

HOME CINEMA

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND & VISION

Choice

WIN! Oppo headphones & amplifier + more...



Ultra HD

Action heroes

Sony and Samsung 4K screens take movies to the next level

ON TEST

Monitor Audio 5.1
BD player roundup
Quadral speakers
Cambridge Audio
AV receiver

ROAD RAGE!

Fast & Furious 7
puts pedal to the
metal on Blu, p98

ON THE HUNT

Does *Insurgent*
deliver the goods
in high-def?
Turn to p96

PLUS...

- SOUNDBAR MEGATEST
- HOLLYWOOD'S 4K PLANS
- KEVIN PIETERSEN'S CINEMA!

Bravo BT Sport

Europe's first 4K
channel is a winner

Crash Crazy!

The A-Z of movie car chases

EISA
EUROPEAN IMAGING AND
SOUND ASSOCIATION

INSIDE EISA AWARDS 2015-2016 – CELEBRATING
THE VERY BEST IN HOME CINEMA HARDWARE, p111

www.homecinemachoice.com

ISSUE 251 OCTOBER 2015 £4.75
AUS- \$11.99 NZ- \$13.50 CAN- \$14.50





Artcoustic™ Loudspeakers

WWW.ARTCOUSTIC.COM



Spitfire Series

To experience the award winning Artcoustic Spitfire loudspeakers in a dedicated Dolby Atmos* system, please contact one of our showroom partners who have stunning demonstration facilities.



"The soundstage is both wide and deep, able to involve you unhesitatingly in the onscreen action"

"Artcoustic's Spitfire loudspeakers deliver reference volume level home cinema heroics, without ever sounding like it's out of control"

Home Cinema Choice



AUDIOVATION
AVA PROJECTS
BESPOKE HOME CINEMAS
NORTH EAST HOME CINEMA
CIRCLE AUTOMATION
ET HOME CINEMA
FUTUREHOME
HOME CINEMA AND BEYOND
MANGO VISION
MUSICAL IMAGES
PYRAMID AV
RAYLEIGH HIFI SOUND & VISION
WEBSTRACT

NORTH
NORTH WEST
NORTH
NORTH EAST
SOUTH EAST
NORTH
SOUTH EAST
MIDLANDS
SOUTH EAST
SOUTH EAST
SOUTH WEST
SOUTH EAST
SOUTH EAST

AUDIOVATION.CO.UK
AVA-PROJECTS.COM
BESPOKEHOME CINEMAS.CO.UK
NORTHEASTHOME CINEMA.COM
CIRCLEAUTOMATION.CO.UK
ETHOME CINEMA.CO.UK
FUTUREHOME.CO.UK
HOME CINEMA AND BEYOND.CO.UK
MANGOVISION.CO.UK
MUSICAL-IMAGES.CO.UK
PYRAMIDAV.CO.UK
RAYLEIGHHIFI.COM
WEBSTRACT.CO.UK

*Please confirm with the dealer in your area regarding Dolby Atmos, not all are upgraded yet.

DOLBY ATMOS

UK showroom Tel. +44 (0) 1245 400904 · DK showroom Tel. +45 3283 6060

HOME CINEMA Choice

www.homecinemachoice.com

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor Mark Craven
mark.craven@homecinemachoice.com
Deputy Editor Anton van Beek
anton.vanbeek@homecinemachoice.com
Art Editor John Rook

CONTRIBUTORS

Steve May, Adrian Justins, John Archer, Vincent Teoh, Tekura Maeva, Ed Selley, Scott Snowden, Danny Phillips, Adam Rayner, Martin Pipe
Photography Mike Prior, Claire Collins

ADVERTISING

Advertising Sales Executive Sonia Smart
Tel: 07710 394391
E-mail: sonia.smart@hifinews.com

Advertising Sales Executive Simon Dunn
Tel: 01689 869853
E-mail: simon.dunn@hifichoice.co.uk

MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1689 869898
E-mail: mytimemedia@subscription.co.uk
USA & CANADA: New, Renewals and Enquiries
(001)-866-647-9191
REST OF WORLD: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1689 869 896

BACK ISSUES

Tel: 0844 848 8822
From outside UK: +44 (0) 2476 322234
Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com
www.myhobbystore.co.uk

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Group Editor Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk
Group Sales Manager Rhona Bolger
Head of Design and Production Julie Miller
Subscriptions Manager Kate Hall
Chief Executive Owen Davies
Chairman Peter Harkness

Published by MyTimeMedia Ltd

Enterprise House, Enterprise Way
Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF
Tel: 0844 412 2262
From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869 840

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd

TEST WALL IMAGES:
©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/CUI QUNYING
©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SIMON INGATE



Home Cinema Choice, ISSN 1369-6276, is published monthly with an additional issue in May by AVTech Media Ltd, a division of MYTIMEDIA Ltd, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, UK. The US annual subscription price is \$59.99 (equivalent to approximately 106.00 USD). Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. US Postmaster: Send address changes to Home Cinema Choice, Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at CDS GLOBAL Ltd, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9EF. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.



If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask!

Subject to availability

Please reserve/deliver my copy of Home Cinema Choice on a regular basis, starting with issue:

Title _____ First name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone number _____

If you don't want to miss an issue



Mad Max:
Fury Road, p14

WELCOME

With this year's new footballing season comes a new way of watching – in super-sharp 4K resolution courtesy of BT's freshly-minted Ultra HD Sport channel. The phrase 'game-changer' is bandied about quite a lot (and it's something I'm guilty of, I know), but in this case it's apposite. This is Europe's first Ultra HD channel and, yes, it looks superb. See p56 for our review.



Of course, **you'll need a 4K TV to appreciate BT's next-gen broadcasts, and this issue we've got a handsome duo on test** – Sony's keenly-priced X85C and Samsung's HDR-ready JS8500. Both are capable of stunning

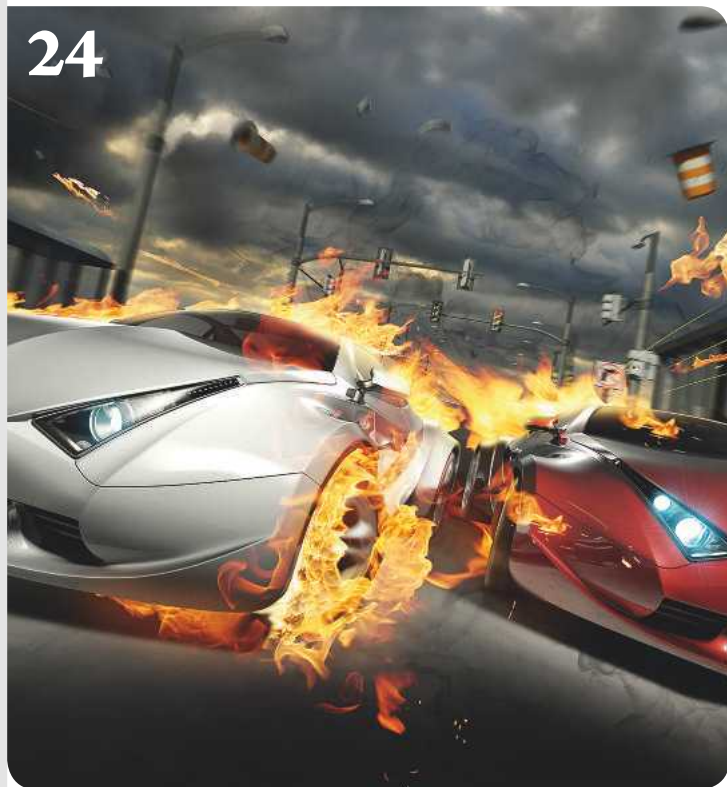
images, but as our reviews show, there's still a lot more to consider when buying a TV than pure picture quality. Do you want an Android set? Will a curved design suit your viewing room? Are you fussed about 3D? Decisions, decisions...

Mark Craven
Editor



WIN!
Oppo portable
amp/DAC and
headphones
worth £600!
p78

MENU



CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer:
The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Steve May:
HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



Martin Pipe:
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the home cinema industry



Adam Rayner:
The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and, er, cartoons



Adrian Justins:
Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*

FEATURES

In-depth interviews and special reports. Starts... p18

18 The future of cinema is strong with this one...

HCC travels to Panasonic's Hollywood Lab to discover the role the tech brand plays in the filmmaking eco-system and how this impacts its display technology

COVER STORY

24 A to Z of movie car chases!

Go crash crazy as we spotlight the stuntmen, directors, iconic cars and breathtaking sequences that have made the car chase a key part of cinema history

30 And the geek shall inherit the Earth

Discover why the San Diego Comic-Con has become a mecca for movie fans

34 System that hits for six!

Cricket legend Kevin Pietersen's Dolby Atmos movie den is guaranteed to bowl you over

90 Certified: AV-Holic

Another HCC reader shares their AV setup

BULLETIN

The place for hot products, trends and technology. Starts... p7

07 S for superior?

Quad's new S Series speaker range is here

08 For your reference

Loewe launches 55in Reference Ultra HD TV

09 Hisense gets aggressive on 4K

Chinese AV behemoth hits the UK promising 'premium screens at affordable prices'

10 Yamaha reboots MusicCast

Wireless audio system gets a new lease of life alongside a Dolby Atmos soundbar

12 BBC pushes the sound barrier

Legendary broadcaster's R&D team shows off its experiments with next-generation sonics

13 News x10

Featuring NHK, *Star Wars*, B&O and Toshiba

14 On the road again

Post-apocalyptic blockbuster *Mad Max: Fury Road* gears up for action on Blu-ray and DVD

REGULARS

Whether you want our opinions or your own, these are the places to look. Starts... p81

81 Digital copy

Mark Craven can't wait to see what new AV hardware the IFA tech expo has up its sleeve

82 Film fanatic

Anton van Beek watches a lot of bad films. Now it's time to start sharing them with you...

84 Picture this

Video calibrator Vincent Teoh weighs up the pros and cons of VA and IPS LCD panels

86 Feedback

Share your thoughts with other AV addicts

122 AV Avenger

Thanks to Amazon and Netflix, Steve May is drowning in unmissable TV

COMPETITIONS

88 Great BDs & DVDs to be won!

My Darling Clementine, *The Knick: Season One* and *Modern Family: Season Six* up for grabs!



34

'Who watches movies in a room like this? England cricket legend Kevin Pietersen!'



40



44



52



61

REVIEWS

With a focus on performance, these are in-depth tests you can trust... p39

40 Monitor Audio Gold 300AV

Not the Platinum range, but these high-end speakers are still deeply impressive

COVER STORY

44 Samsung UE55JS8500

Take your movies to the next level with this cutting-edge 55in 4K/Ultra HD LED TV

48 Quadral Rhodium 5.1

Revamped mid-range multichannel speaker package from the German sound wizard

COVER STORY

52 Sony KD-55X8505C

Superb motion handling makes this affordable 55in 4K/Ultra HD TV a real action hero

COVER STORY

56 BT TV UHD/Humax DTR-T4000

Meet the new champions of TV sport with Europe's first Ultra HD channel and Humax's 4K-compatible YouView PVR

58 Cambridge Audio CXR120

Performance-focused seven-channel networked AVR is likely to find fans

61 Group test: Affordable Blu-ray players

Will the LG BP550, Panasonic DMP-BDT370, Samsung BD-J5900 or Sony BDP-S5500 be crowned the best bargain Blu-ray deck?

70 Roundup: Soundbars... and a soundbase, too

Seven models from Evolve Audio, LG, Maxell, Orbitound, Panasonic, Philips and Yamaha put through their paces

76 Long-term test: Yamaha RX-A3040

Can this nine-channel Dolby Atmos AV receiver still win us over now that DTS:X rivals are on the horizon?

111 The European Imaging & Sound Association Awards 2015-2016

Celebrate the best of the best in home entertainment with the winners of this year's EISA Awards

PLAYBACK

The latest Blu-rays, DVDs and videogames reviewed and rated. Starts... p95

96 The Divergent Series: Insurgent 3D

97 Pitch Perfect 2
Home: Party Edition
Child 44
Good Kill

98 Fast & Furious 7

100 Batman: Arkham Knight
Godzilla
X-Men: Days of Future Past – Rogue Cut
The Knick: The Complete First Season
The Decline of Western Civilisation Collection

101 The Third Man

102 Wild Card: Extended Edition
The Town That Dreaded Sundown (1976)
The Town That Dreaded Sundown (2014)
Everly
Into the Grizzly Maze

104 My Darling Clementine: Limited Edition

105 Eyes Without a Face
Suite Française
The Saboteurs
White God
Man with a Movie Camera

106 Zombi Holocaust
Riki-Oh: The Story of Ricky
Anthropophagus; X-Ray



PERFECT BLACK
CREATES
PERFECT COLOUR

Combining LG's unique OLED technology with 4K resolution, LG OLED 4K TV brings you the finest viewing experience imaginable, delivering the purest blacks, most brilliant colours and clearest images.

Masterfully engineered with a discreet style and sound designed by Harman / Kardon™, the LG OLED TV is the World's most advanced TV. Ever.

lg.com/uk/discoveredoled

LG OLED TV

avforums
**REFERENCE
STATUS**
AWARD

LG 55EG960V
APRIL 2015

Stuff
★★★★★

LG 55EG960V
JUNE 2015

WHAT HI·FI?

★★★★★

LG 55EG960V
MAY 2015

BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** **LOEWE** Introducing a new 'Reference' for 4K/UHD TV performance **HISENSE** Delivering premium screens at affordable prices **YAMAHA** AV brand reboots its wireless audio streaming system **BBC** How the Beeb is planning ahead for broadcast audio **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-sized chunks **MAD MAX: FURY ROAD** You'd be mad to miss this Blu-ray **AND MORE!**

S for superior?

Quad S Series → www.quad-hifi.co.uk



Need some new high-performance speakers? Quad's S Series range marries Kevlar-coned bass/midrange drivers with a bespoke ribbon tweeter unit that the brand boasts is capable of delivering high frequencies 'audibly superior to those supplied by typical dome tweeters.' Arriving in a five-strong lineup, you can assemble your S Series array from the S-1 (£500 p/pr) and S-2 (£800 p/pr, pictured) standmounts, the S-4 (£1,300 p/pr) and S-5 (£1,600 p/pr) three-way floorstanders, and the dedicated two-way S-C centre (£500).

HCC ONLINE...

Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at www.homecinemachoice.com Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

For your reference

Loewe Reference 4K Ultra HD TV → www.loewe.tv

A SAFE BET

Statham doubles down as *Wild Card* hits Blu-ray, p102

Premium AV brand Loewe has introduced its new 55in Reference 4K Ultra HD TV. Engineered in Germany and priced around £3,800, the screen boasts an anti-reflective high-contrast glass filter, an eight-speaker integrated 120W soundbar and a 1TB hard drive that operates as both a built-in PVR and a video server for your home network. This high-end TV also features HDCP 2.2 and HEVC compatibility, Bluetooth audio streaming and DLNA connectivity. Larger 85in and 75in models will follow soon.

Klipsch adds Atmos



Klipsch has given its Reference Premiere line a Dolby Atmos boost in the US with three new models. The RP-280FA (\$2,400 p/pr) is a tower speaker with an integrated height channel, while the RP-140SA (\$500 p/pr) can be used to add Atmos elevation to an existing system or as a surround speaker in its own right. Finally, the RP-450CA (\$850) centre channel has been designed specifically to complement the two other models. You can expect the new speakers to hit the UK in the coming months, prices TBC. www.klipsch.com

Bigger, better 'bases



Following the success of its previous DM50 and DM75 soundbases, Canton has introduced a trio of new models. The six-driver DM55 (£330) and eight-driver DM75 (£400) replace the earlier models, while the ten-driver DM100 (£530, pictured) has been designed for larger flatscreen TVs. All three feature 2.1-channel amplification with 200W of power, apt-X Bluetooth support, improved audio, optical and coaxial digital inputs, two new sound modes and a power save function. www.cantondm.co.uk

Wireless EGGcellence



KEF has introduced a wireless Bluetooth speaker incarnation of its popular EGG design. Designed as a complete 'plug and play' speaker package, with integrated amplification and DAC, the £350 KEF Wireless Digital Music System uses the brand's UniQ driver array, is available in three finishes (Gloss Black, Pure White and Frosted Blue) and offers Bluetooth apt-X functionality as well as high-res music compatibility, thanks to a built-in 24-bit/96kHz USB input. You can also connect a KEF sub for added bass. www.kef.com

Hisense gets aggressive on 4K

Chinese TV behemoth promises 'premium screens at affordable prices'

China's biggest TV brand is planning to drive down the cost of 4K UHD ownership this Autumn, with its first major assault on the UK TV market. It's been offering low-cost TVs for a while now, but 2160p will mark a significant step change for the brand.

'The strapline we're using is "Premium brand, Affordable prices",' beams Howard Grindrod, Deputy Managing Director of Hisense UK. 'We've got Hisense products selling in Germany, Italy, Spain. We have been selling Hisense TVs in the UK market, but it's all been about a build up to 4K.'

The company is planning to debut 4K/UHD screens at all points north of 40in, with 40in, 43in, 50in, 55in, 58in and 65in 2160p models all incoming. There will be two curved options, one 55in, the other 65in. 'We've got the screen size availability,' shrugs Grindrod, noting that Hisense is the world's third largest producer of LCD panels.

'We've also developed our own picture processing technologies which will be introduced on the 65in screens,' he tells HCC. 'We're number one in the Chinese market for screens and have been for the past nine years. We have an 18 per cent brand share there.'

As yet there is no news on the Smart platform Hisense will use, although Grindrod rules out Android. 'When we launch our 4K screens we've got to have the right apps on it. We've been working closely



Howard Grindrod: 'Having a new company that makes 4K panels coming into the market is good news for the industry'

with the BBC. We also work very closely with Netflix. There are technical issues behind the scenes which need sorting out...'

Pole position?

Clearly ambitious, it's easy to assume that Hisense has the big Korean TV brands in its sights. 'This isn't about us taking on other manufacturers,' says Grindrod modestly. 'We want to be seen as a brand that has serious intentions. We're not here to attack any other brands, we just want to launch great products and create a little space for ourselves.'

Grindrod says Hisense isn't planning on shipping huge quantities of screens into the UK, at least not yet. 'But naturally because we are the third largest manufacturer of 4K TVs in the world, people will be interested in what we're doing.'

The 4K Hisense invasion will kick-off at IFA, the huge Berlin tech expo. 'That's going to be an important show for us,' we're told. 'Having a new company that manufactures 4K panels coming into the market is good news for the industry and we think that it's going to be good news for consumers too.'



Hisense is boosting its profile by sponsoring the Infiniti Red Bull F1 team

PLAYLIST...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

Fast & Furious 6 (All-region BD)

Not that we need an excuse to give any of these films a spin, but the arrival of Part 7 on Blu-ray (see p98) had us digging out the previous instalment once again.



Videodrome: Limited Edition (Region B BD)



The short films and other extras ensure that this is the definitive edition of David Cronenberg's sci-fi/horror masterpiece.

LEGO Jurassic World (XOne/X360/PS4/PS3)



The best LEGO game in ages will keep you going for yonks with its myriad secrets. Have you unlocked the Steven Spielberg minifig yet?

Dead Shadows (R2 DVD)



Debut director David Cholewa's inventive mix of *Dawn of the Dead* and *The Thing* is a must-see for fans of '80s-style horror.

A Funny Kind of Love (R2 DVD)



This Australian comedy finds plenty of sweetness among the smut in its exploration of fetishism.

EXTRAS...

Small items that could make a big impression

The Making of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey



Originally available as part of a £450 multi-volume

limited edition released last year, Taschen's comprehensive visual account of the creation of Kubrick's sci-fi stunner is now available at a much more wallet-friendly price. £50 is all it costs to get your hands on 562 pages of rare photographs and concept art!



Oathkeeper

Made from stainless steel

and bronze, this officially licensed replica of Brienne of Tarth's sword from *Game of Thrones* measures 41.5in, comes with its own display plaque and will set you back £255.

Star Wars: The Imperial Handbook



From the history of the Imperial Army to identifying high-profile Rebel targets, the fourth of Titan's

in-universe *Star Wars* handbooks tells you everything you need to know about being a loyal member of Emperor Palpatine's Galactic Empire. Yours for £13.

Yamaha reboots MusicCast

AV specialist builds wireless audio system into pretty much everything

Yamaha has relaunched MusicCast, its original multiroom audio system, as a wireless streaming technology embedded into a wide range of hardware, including its first Dolby Atmos-enabled soundbar. The launch is the most extensive multiroom streaming proposition to be offered by any single brand.

No fewer than 23 products across nine categories will be MusicCast compatible this year, including AV receivers, soundbars, wireless music speakers and active speaker lines. Audio content played through one device can be distributed to any other MusicCast device on the network. TV audio, radio – even vinyl played through a MusicCast amp – can be routed across the ecosystem. Streaming music services, such as Spotify or Napster, can be pushed from a mobile device running Yamaha's MusicCast app to any connected device.

The company first launched MusicCast in 2003, pre-empting today's multiroom wireless gold rush. 'We didn't have a smartphone market and we didn't have network music streaming services,' recalls Tadashi Sugiyama, Yamaha's Chief Officer for AV engineering. Today the technology is not so much a product as a platform. Sugiyama says that Yamaha is committed to ongoing software development for MusicCast and cites extensive in-house networking expertise, 'We have been producing routers in Japan for 20 years.'

Uniquely, any Bluetooth speaker can also be integrated into the MusicCast network.

The system supports native playback of hi-res audio formats. File compatibility is good, although there are some limitations depending on hardware. 24-bit/192kHz FLAC, WAV and AIFF, along with 96kHz Apple lossless, MP3, AAC and WMA files are



Chris Wray: 'The YSP-5600SW is the first soundbar to hit the market with object-based audio support'

all playable across all MusicCast devices. 5.6MHz DSD MusicCast playback is restricted to AVRs, stereo amps and select speakers.

Atmos soundbar

Interestingly, one of the brand's new MusicCast-enabled soundbars is the YSP-5600SW, notable also for being Yamaha's first Dolby Atmos and DTS:X-enabled single-box solution. The sound projector features 32 array beam speakers, two woofers and 12 ceiling-directed beam speakers.

'Using 44 speakers it can project sound beams not only around the room but off the ceiling as well, giving you the height element to object-based audio soundtracks,' product specialist Chris Wray told *HCC*.

Also MusicCast-enabled will be the new RX-S601 slimline receiver. Both are expected to be released around September, prices TBA.



New soundbar offers MusicCast and Atmos

From Cambridge to Hong Kong

UK brand debuts new high-end universal disc player at Far East tech expo

The CXU features the latest Mediatek chipsets for 'lightning-fast and truly universal' playback

Cambridge Audio had a surprise in store for home cinema fans attending the recent Hong Kong High End AV Show in the form of the CXU, a brand-new universal disc player that is scheduled to be available through Richer Sounds in the UK any day now, priced around £900.

The CXU supports Blu-ray (including 3D), DVD, CD, SACD, DVD-A and even HDCD. Darbee Visual Presence video processing tech is also on hand for those looking to experiment.

Handling the sonic side are five Wolfson WM8740 DACs in addition to Cambridge Audio's proprietary ATF (Adaptive Time Filtering) processing to upsample all audio to 24-bit/192kHz.

Connective options include two HDMI outputs with ARC, two HDMI inputs (one with MHL compatibility), a 7.1 multichannel analogue output, coaxial and optical digital audio inputs, plus a trio of USB 2.0 ports.





PMC[®]
The emmy[®] award winners

We believe you should experience the movies as Hollywood intended

- You can do this with a **twenty** series surround system



"PMC's devotion to utter clarity and even-handed delivery works wonders with music and movies too – turning bold multichannel mixes into works of art." - Sept '15

The list of films composed, mixed or mastered using PMC is enormous: Life of Pi, Skyfall, Iron Man, Armageddon, The Dark Knight, American Beauty, Man of Steel, The Avengers, Pirates of the Caribbean and Titanic, to name but a few.

If you want to recreate the awe-inspiring realism and stunning dynamics of a blockbuster movie then there is no better choice of loudspeaker than the ones used to make the movies themselves.

To find out why nothing will bring you closer

See our dealer listing online, or contact us

T +44 (0) 870 4441044
www.pmc-speakers.com

Unrivalled
Platinum
twenty year warranty*

* Passive models

DIARY

Our calendar ensures that you don't miss out...

→ AUGUST

28: Straight Outta Compton

Notorious Californian hip-hop outfit N.W.A (which included Dr. Dre, Eazy-E and Ice Cube among its lineup) is the subject of this electrifying music biopic. Fans of the group's pioneering music should roll down to their local multiplex. www.universalpictures.co.uk

31: Monsters: Dark Continent

The sequel to Gareth Edwards' ultra-low budget sci-fi creature-feature *Monsters* makes its belated debut on DVD and Blu-ray today. uk.eonefilms.com

→ SEPTEMBER



04: IFA 2015

The Messe Berlin throws open its doors today and welcomes visitors to Europe's biggest technology expo. Expect plenty of new-look home cinema hardware joined by the ever-present 'Miss IFA'. www.ifa-berlin.com/en

11: The Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials

The Hunger Games may be coming to an end, but audiences just can't get enough of 'Young Adult' dystopian sci-fi. Case in point: this sequel to last year's *The Maze Runner*, which arrives in UK cinemas today. www.fox.co.uk

14: Star Wars: Rebels – The Complete Season One

Arriving on DVD and Blu-ray after a successful run on Disney XD, this animated series takes place in the gap between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope* and is a must-see for all *Star Wars* fans. www.disney.co.uk

21: John Wick



Almost eight months after it hit the US, Keanu Reeves' explosive new action thriller makes an appearance on Blu-ray and DVD in the UK. So long as it has the same bombastic Dolby Atmos mix, then those who didn't import the US platter are in for a real treat! www.warnerbros.co.uk

24: HCC #252

The next issue of your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and in-depth software reviews. www.homecinemachoice.com

BBC pushes the sound barrier

Away from *The Voice*, the Beeb is working hard on next-gen sonics

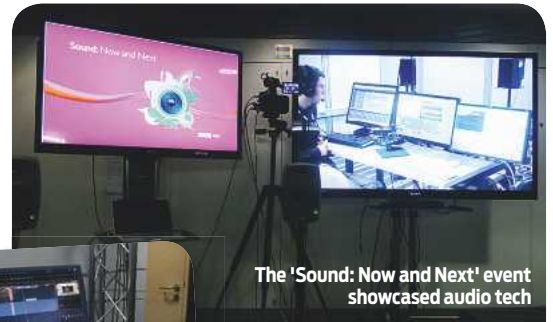
Few viewers of BBC programmes will be aware of BBC R&D, the broadcaster's respected research and development department. Its responsibilities – to maintain the Beeb's rep as a 'centre of excellence' for broadcast technologies, working with academic institutions and industry – are defined in the current Royal Charter. It's a powerhouse of the sorts of technology that underpin a key UK creative industry. So when HCC was invited to its 'Sound: Now and Next' event at Broadcasting House, we jumped at the chance.

The tech on show was never short of fascinating and included variable-length on-demand radio programmes that ensure listeners in a hurry won't miss the gist; a Raspberry Pi-based open-source internet radio for education and developing countries; 'auralisation' (modelling acoustic environments); distributed production over IP networks (the BBC relied on an 'IP Studio' during the Glasgow Commonwealth Games); ambisonics and immersive audio; and an investigation into the subtle timbral differences between microphones.

Some of these projects are being carried out under the auspices of S3A – a five-year 'future spatial audio' partnership between the BBC, three universities (Surrey, Southampton and Salford) and the EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) funding body. Over the years, the BBC has been responsible for theoretical and experimental work in the fields of quadraphonics, ambisonics and binaural audio (radio listeners may have heard the binaural versions of the *Private Peaceful* drama that were broadcast online in 2012). The technology is moving fast, and powerful DSP allows all kinds of convincing psychoacoustic tricks to be played on our hearing.

Getting Kinected

One of the S3A projects examined the 3D headphone simulation of various listening environments (stereo, binaural and 17-channel surround), which would enable content producers to assess their material without rooms of equipment that might not be available. It employed a cheap off-the-shelf Kinect sensor to track the position of the listener and optimise the 'sweet spot'. As the listener's head moves, spatial cues change accordingly. Up to six people can currently be catered for – all will get a listening experience uncompromised by where they're sitting, closer to



The 'Sound: Now and Next' event showcased audio tech



what the programme producer had in mind.

On a similar theme was York University's virtual recreation of the city's historic Theatre Royal. Wear the virtual reality headset and (binaural) headphones,

and the perspective of what you saw/heard shifted according to head position. Although the display resolution was limited, the effect was credible. Applied to consumer electronics, such technology could enhance gaming and futuristic sports coverage.

Another demo employed a 17.2-channel speaker array, showing how staff at different locations (Broadcasting House and Salford's MediaCityUK) could collaborate on complex object-based audio productions in real-time. The demo was built around 64 objects plus a multichannel 'bed' and used the multiple speakers to stunning effect. An HD camera and monitor at either end provided 'face-to-face' communication between the parties, with surprisingly little delay. It was interesting to see the Salford operator make changes on his console and hear the result of the tweaks hundreds of miles away (in the Broadcasting House room, the sound could also be tweaked with an app running on a tablet). As a tech that can help avoid travel between sites, it could save the Beeb much-needed money.

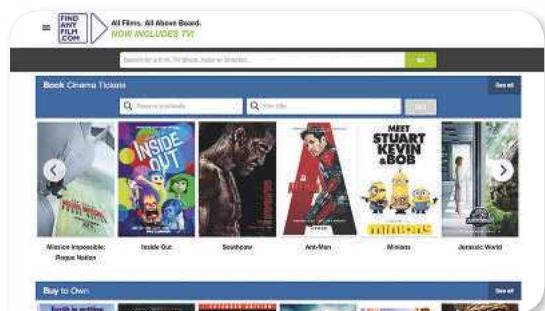
And we were given an update on Dolby's work into a scaled-down version of Atmos for TV, which would let telly addicts customise soundtracks. Transforming constituent elements into objects could lead to a personalised experience. Football fans, for example, could tailor what they hear to the perspective of their teams they support, by balancing the appropriate commentaries and terrace

ambience. Music lovers could listen to a concert from a specific position within the venue, or even change the mix so that, for instance, the brass section or lead guitar is more prominent. This system would work by transmitting the additional audio online, rather than via broadcast spectrum.



BBC's Broadcasting House in the heart of London's West End

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Film finding site relaunched

The Industry Trust for IP Awareness has relaunched its Findanyfilm.com website. Designed as an online destination for the film industry to showcase content and direct consumers to legal points of purchase (be it cinema tickets, pre-ordering Blu-rays or digital downloads), the site has been given a major overhaul that includes a streamlined front-end and more mobile-friendly design with clearer navigation, plus enhanced content including premium TV titles.

2 Forget 4K!

While punters are still weighing up the merits of buying a 4K TV, Japanese broadcaster NHK has carried out another 8K trial, this time from New York's Yankee Stadium. NHK aims to roll out 8K content in Japan by 2020.

3 Return of the Blu-rays

With a new *Star Wars* movie on the way to cinemas, it comes as no surprise to learn that Fox is re-releasing the previous films on Blu-ray. Sadly, instead of giving fans the theatrical cuts of the original trilogy, they're reissuing the existing Blu-rays, albeit in a repackaged version of the nine-disc *The Complete Saga* boxset and as a series of six single-disc Steelbooks.

4 B&O goes multiroom

Bang & Olufsen has launched its own multiroom streaming audio solution. The BeoLink Multiroom system can unite a variety of new B&O kit (including the BeoVision 11 and BeoVision Avant TVs), as well as some older non-network products (such as the BeoSound 9000 all-in-one system and BeoGram 4000 turntable) via the BeoLink Converter.

5 Hisense buys Sharp America

As well as preparing an aggressive launch into the UK market, Chinese TV maker Hisense (see p9) has acquired Sharp America in a deal worth \$23.7m. The deal gives Hisense the rights to use the Sharp name in North and South America, and includes all equity and assets for Sharp's TV factory in Mexico.

6 DVD ripping illegal again

The High Court has overturned the 2014 changes made to UK copyright law that allowed people to legally make copies of CDs and DVDs they own for personal use. The British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors, the Musicians' Union and UK Music challenged the ruling on the grounds that the revised law failed to provide fair compensation to the rights holders.

7 Long live the Queen!

Universal Music has announced a deluxe new 180g vinyl Queen boxset. Said to be five years in the making, the *Queen: Studio Collection* is released on September 25 priced £285, and brings together newly remastered versions of all 15 of the band's studio albums. On the same day, Rega will release a celebratory £350 'Queen by Rega' turntable that employs a hand-built RB101 tone arm, a high performance motor and a Rega Carbon MM cartridge. Audio ga-ga!

8 Ultimate PS4

Sony Computer Entertainment UK has launched a new 'Ultimate Player Edition' of its PlayStation 4 console. Priced £350, its main selling point is a 1TB HDD offering twice as much storage as the previous version of the PS4.

9 Toshiba rocked by scandal

Toshiba Corp. chief executive and president Hisao Tanaka and eight other executives at the Japanese tech giant have resigned following a financial investigation that revealed the company had overstated its operating profit by a total of 152bn Japanese yen (£780m) over a period of six years!

10 Superbit reborn?

With the launch of Ultra HD Blu-ray approaching, Sony Pictures has decided to muddy the waters further for consumers already baffled by its 'Mastered in 4K' Blu-rays. The studio's new 'Supreme Cinema Series' range of BDs feature new 4K restorations partnered with Dolby Atmos audio. First up is *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, which will boast a selection of new extras when it hits the US on October 6. There's no word yet on whether or not this 'limited edition' range will also be launched in the UK.



PREMIERE

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Emoji movie happening

Sony has struck a deal for the rights to make an animated movie about emoji (those smiley faces people like to use on social media). We could really do with one of those 'thumbs down' emojis right now...

Back to the Jurassic



Jurassic World has passed *Avengers Assemble* to become the third highest grossing film of all time, behind *Titanic* and *Avatar*. Having now taken over \$1.5 billion globally, it's hardly a surprise that Universal is fast-tracking a sequel for release in June, 2018. Chris Pratt and Dallas Bryce Howard are slated to return.

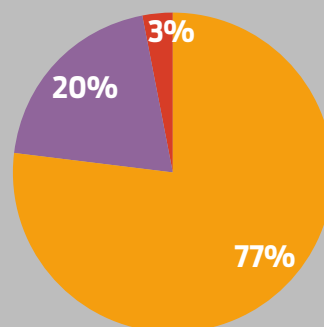
Xena not rebooted

Lucy Lawless has shot down recent stories about a potential reboot of her cult TV fantasy series *Xena: Warrior Princess*. The actress took to Twitter, stating: 'Sorry, friends! News of a #Xena reboot is just a rumour. I'd love it to happen one day but it's still in the wishful thinking stage.' Shame.

WE ASKED...

How many subwoofers do you currently employ in your home cinema setup?


Just the one A powerful pair None



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

On the road again

Mad Max: Fury Road → Warner Bros. Home Entertainment → All-region BD & R2 DVD



It's been 30 years since Max Rockatansky last appeared on cinema screens, but like a fine wine the post-apocalyptic warrior has only got better with age. One of the most spectacular action flicks ever crafted, *Mad Max: Fury Road* arrives on Digital HD on September 21, followed by Blu-ray, 3D Blu-ray and DVD on October 5. Packed with stonking scenes of vehicular mayhem that simply scream 'reference-quality AV experience', you'd have to be, well... mad not to put this BD in your shopping basket.

CITY HOME CINEMAS

TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC



Magic at your fingertips

Our unique showroom boasts the ultimate in magical lighting and ease of use
with world beating technologies from Rako, Aurora and Control4.
Create the perfect atmosphere at the touch of a button.



MAKING MOVIE GOING AN OCCASION



City Home Cinemas, 750 Sidcup Road, London SE9 3NS. Tel: 020 8860 9363
Email: peter@cityhomecinemas.co.uk • graham@cityhomecinemas.co.uk • www.cityhomecinemas.co.uk

DIRECT DEBIT SUBSCRIPTIONS *UK ONLY*

Yes, I would like to subscribe to Home Cinema Choice

- ☐ **Print + Digital:** £12.74 every 3 months
(**SAVE 32%** on shop price + **SAVE 74%** on Digital Download + **FREE GIFT**)
- ☐ **Print:** £10.49 every 3 months (**SAVE 32%** on shop price + **FREE GIFT**)


YOUR DETAILS *MUST BE COMPLETED*

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address
Postcode Country
Tel Mobile.....
Email D.O.B

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address
Postcode Country

INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUR BANK/BUILDING SOCIETY

Originator's reference 422562 
Name of bank.....
Address of bank.....
Postcode
Account holder.....
Signature..... Date
Sort code Account number

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay MyTimeMedia Ltd. Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with MyTimeMedia Ltd and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Reference Number (official use only)

Please note that banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of account.

CARD PAYMENTS & OVERSEAS

Yes, I would like to subscribe to Home Cinema Choice, for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment

UK ONLY:

- ☐ **Print + Digital:** £53.49
(**SAVE 28%** on shop price + **SAVE 74%** on Digital + **FREE GIFT**)
- ☐ **Print:** £44.49 (**SAVE 28%** on shop price + **FREE GIFT**)

EUROPE & ROW:

- ☐ **EU Print + Digital:** £72.00
☐ **EU Print:** £63.00
☐ **ROW Print + Digital:** £74.00
☐ **ROW Print:** £65.00

PAYMENT DETAILS

☐ Postal Order/Cheque ☐ Visa/MasterCard ☐ Maestro
Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code V791 on the back
Cardholder's name.....
Card no: (Maestro)
Valid from..... Expiry date..... Maestro issue no.....
Signature..... Date.....

Offer ends 24th September 2015. MyTimeMedia Ltd & Home Cinema Choice may contact you with information about our other products and services. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by MyTimeMedia Ltd & Home Cinema Choice please tick here: ☐ Email ☐ Post ☐ Phone. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: ☐ Post ☐ Phone. If you wish to be contacted by email by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: ☐ Email

**POST THIS FORM TO: HOME CINEMA CHOICE
SUBSCRIPTIONS, TOWER HOUSE, SOVEREIGN PARK,
MARKET HARBOROUGH, LEICS LE16 9EF**

**HURRY
OFFER
CLOSES
SEPT 24
2015**



PRINT + DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Free One For All Powerline Adapter Starter Kit worth £39.99*

13 issues *delivered to your door*

Save up to **32% off the shop price**

Download each new issue to your device

A **74% discount** on your Digital subscription

Access your subscription on *multiple devices*

Access to the **Online Archive** dating back to August 2011



PRINT SUBSCRIPTION

Free One For All Powerline Adapter Starter Kit worth £39.99*

13 issues *delivered to your door*

Save up to **32% off the shop price**

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

**DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTIONS
AVAILABLE ONLINE!**

Receive a **WORTH £39.99*** *One For All Powerline Adapter Starter Kit** when you subscribe today



**'Ideal for
streaming music
and hi-def video'**

One For All's Internet to TV Link 200 provides a fuss-free way to create a fast and reliable network connection between your network-enabled AV devices using your existing household electrical wiring, and with speeds of up to 200Mbps these Powerline network adapters are ideal for streaming music and HD video content throughout your house. It's also handy for bringing internet connectivity to rooms where you haven't run a network cable or ones that are too remote for a wireless signal.

Setup is simple: just plug the adapters into your power outlets to create a reliable network connection, and keep your network safe with a push of the security button.



**SAVE
32%** ON THE
SHOP PRICE &
74% ON DIGITAL**

Specifications:

- Supports 3D & Full HD video
- Maximum speed 200Mbps
- Cable lengths of up to 300m
- 128-bit AES security
- Homeplug AV and IEEE 1901 compliant
- Less than 0.5W power consumption in Standby

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 24th September 2015. *UK Direct Debit offer only. Please see www.homecinemachoice.com/terms for full terms & conditions.

SUBSCRIBE SECURELY ONLINE

 www.subscription.co.uk/hccl/v791

CALL OUR ORDER LINE

 **0844 543 8200 (quote ref V791)**

Lines open weekdays 8am - 9.30pm & Saturday 8am - 4pm

BT landline calls to 0844 numbers will cost no more than 5p per minute. Calls from mobiles usually cost more.

THE FUTURE OF HOME CINEMA IS STRONG WITH

Panasonic is part of a Hollywood eco-system concerned with ensuring our displays can keep up with the changing standards in movie mastering. **Steve May** travels to Los Angeles and beyond to take a peek at home cinema's kaleidoscopic future

4K PICTURE RESOLUTION was just the beginning. Ultra HD is about to usher in a whole new era of image fidelity. High Dynamic Range pictures and assorted wide colour technologies are conspiring to reinvent the viewing experience. At least that's the hope of Hollywood's creative elite.

What's more, this psychedelic upheaval is poised to up-end home cinema lore and conventions. Our obsession with Cinema presets and adherence to Rec. 709 (aka BT. 709) image calibration could soon be rendered irrelevant, while devotees of ISF will appear as cloistered monks devoted to media-eval dullness. Nothing will look quite the same again.

Home Cinema Choice is in Hollywood. More specifically, we're visiting the all-new Panasonic Hollywood Lab. We've been here several times before, although to be precise, PHL has moved. Previously the facility was a short stroll from the Universal Studios theme park. Now the operation has been consolidated into a nearby office block.

The Panasonic Hollywood Lab, where light shines on 4K Blu-ray and more



But the vibe (of a privileged few having way too much fun) remains unchanged. It's my first stop on a tour of creative boltholes.

Panasonic, probably more than any other consumer electronics outfit, has integrated itself into the fabric of Hollywood's technical and creative community. Its ongoing collaborations with the in-crowd stem from its '90s acquisition of Universal Studios, an early attempt to merge a technology powerhouse with a production company. That marriage wasn't to last, but some ties bind.

1993's High Definition Telecine Centre (HDTC) was an early foray into transferring film images to HD TV, albeit in analogue Hi-Vision. 'Film had never been scanned at those resolutions before,' recalls Panasonic Hollywood Lab VP and director Ron Martin. 'It was very exciting!' The first movies released in HD in Japan from a Hollywood studio were the *Back to the Future* trilogy, he adds.

In 1995, Panasonic opened the Digital Video Compression Centre (DVCC), a joint project with Universal to develop authoring and compression solutions for DVD (you would have seen the DVCC logo a gazillion times on the end credits of those discs you used to buy).

Then PHL started formally in 2001, as an overt R&D facility. It effectively was a sister organisation to the DVCC and HDTC. The work done here was key to the development of the Blu-ray format – PHL won an Emmy for AVC encoding. 'Now we're looking at 4K UHD Blu-ray, HDR and VR,' comments Martin. 'We're looking at the future and maturing the present.'

The colour of magic

I'm in Tinsel Town to see how the next evolution in home entertainment will play out. Is tomorrow's

>

THIS ONE...





Daryn Okada (left) and Mike Sowa, Hollywood creatives currently working with Panasonic

TV tech about even more resolution, greater dynamics or brilliant colours? It turns out it's all of the above, with colour the bookies' surprise favourite as your best reason to buy a new TV. HDR isn't so much about peak whites as an extended colour space, and those next-generation panels are aglow with colour gamut enhancements.

Consider Panasonic's 2015 line of flagship 4K UHD TVs. I reckon they're the brand's best 4K screens yet (check back next issue for my review of the CX802). Key to their success is the development of a suite of image processing technologies that celebrate this trinity of colour, dynamics and detail. 'Our 4K Studio Master Processor is the canvas for the artist to paint his art on,' says Yasushi Murayama, Panasonic's TV product planning manager, poetically.

Murayama knows plenty about TV image quality. He oversaw the development of Panasonic's highly-rated VT plasma line. 'They became a reference for the industry,' he says with pride. 'My career has mostly been around plasma. Panasonic plasmas are the *de facto* display in Hollywood movie studios, they're still being used now. This relationship is rooted in the chipset.'

In Panasonic's latest CX802 and curved CR852 screens, this new silicon is partnered with a high-brightness Wide Colour Phosphor panel, resulting in a designation Panasonic calls 4K Pro. It's a potent combination.

'There's a buzz about Quantum Dot [QD] colour in the industry, but Wide Colour Phosphor panels exceed QD in both colour and brightness. QD delivers 92 per cent of the DCI colour space, but WCP delivers 98 per cent,' points out Murayama. 'If you take a Quantum Dot and Wide Colour Phosphor panel and drive them with the same amount of energy, and put our panel at 100 per cent brightness, the QD panel can only produce 53 per cent brightness. Conversely, if you set the two panels at the same brightness level, our panel can achieve the same brightness using 47 per cent less energy. Our panel brightness is much higher,' he concludes.

To exploit its new WCP glass, Panasonic has developed what it dubs the Accurate Colour Drive. 'This utilises a 3D lookup table for colour. With 8,000 registry points it's 80 times more accurate than the average TV.' The Studio Master Processor also handles black level reproduction and enables HDR playback, explains Murayama. The end result could well be a game-changer.

Took a bit longer than 12 parsecs...

From PHL in Los Angeles I take a landspeeder to Skywalker Ranch in the hills north of San Francisco, part of the massive Lucasfilm campus that even includes a shimmering body of water named Lake Ewok. Here, Lucasfilm veteran Paul Matwyi recalls his experience with *Tomorrowland* (pictured below), the first movie released in Dolby Vision HDR for Dolby Cinemas. Pre- and post-production was handled at the Ranch.

Tomorrowland was lensed by cinematographer Claudio Miranda (*Life of Pi*) using a Sony F65 digital cinema camera, at native (actual) 6K resolution. 'The results were spectacular,' enthuses Matwyi, 'but what we learned at every step of the process was that it wasn't about the specs, or the dot pitch, or the resolution. It was about how all these things combine to create a vivid, enjoyable image.'

Lucasfilm began evaluating 4K, as a projection technology, during the production of *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* (pictured, p19). 'Astonishingly to us, the resolution was actually less impressive than the increase in colour depth off the cameras,' he recalls. 'The original Sony Cine Alta cameras (used for the production) offered 4:2:0 colour, and that was what hit us when we blew it up on a 50ft screen. It cemented in my mind that while human beings are sensitive to detail, we are really sensitive to colour.'

Panasonic is working with Hollywood creatives, including colourist Mike Sowa and three-time president of the ASC (American Society of Cinematographers) Daryn Okada. Okada is a filmmaker who has an IMDb credit list as long as your arm. He's shot everything from *Phantasm 2* to *Let's Be Cops*. 'We're always trying to evoke the emotion on the screen. It may seem technical, but we work in an emotional, responsive world,' he tells HCC. 'When I started out my tools were the camera, the film stock, laboratory and then the theatre. Now

'We're looking at the future and maturing the present,' says PHL director and VP Ron Martin



it's changed. And as it changed, we knew we had to start learning what those new technologies would be. We wanted digital projection to be as good or better than what's available in film. That's why the ASC got involved with the DCI specification. It was the first time we as cinematographers were invited into a standards situation. We don't necessarily speak in numbers, it's what we see...'

Okada is well aware how the theatrical experience can differ from that experienced in the home. 'We know where movies are going to be experienced over and over. We want to

'If you want to replicate today's movie-going experience on a 2015 UHD TV, should you even be using "cinema" modes?'

translate what you see on the big screen and make sure you get that at home. That's always been a challenge.' He says the standard-definition era was depressing. 'Colours were different, we had a hard time compensating. The display would take the personality of the film away. You would see the same faces, hear the same music, but it wasn't the same film.

'We painstakingly master all our movies, but it's also about the delivery technology. I cringe when I think of some of the displays my films are watched on. The best thing is when a TV or projection system is neutral. It has to show what we see on our mastering monitors. It's then that we know you see the subtle contrast, the exact colour.'

Currently, mastering suites grade software content to the ageing Rec. 709 standard using established, common hardware. In comparison, authoring and mastering for HDR content is akin to painting saloons in the Wild West. There's currently no consistency in approach between studios, indeed panel makers have forged alliances that have seen different HDR-capable displays go into different studio facilities. An HDR-authored clip created by Fox using a Samsung panel could look completely different when played back on a Panasonic (or other brand display), says Sowa, a long time collaborator of Okada. When 4K BD does break cover, the viewing experience on early disc releases could be all over the place, he cautions.

Moving with the times

Which begs the question: if you actually want to replicate today's cinema experience on a 2015 UHD TV should you even be using cinema modes that mimic an authoring studio display based on standards created for CRT? Cinema presets actually look nothing like what you would see in a modern digital theatre. Grading between a theatrical release with P3 (DCI) colour and its Rec. 709 home version is quite different.

THX is synonymous with home cinema standards. Jon Cielo, its senior systems

engineer, who I meet at 32Ten studios in nearby San Rafael, says we're in a period of transition. 'We're working on a mode for THX HDR now. We've had a draft of our HDR spec since 2014. The big thing is trying to find the metrics and performance capabilities. The studios want consumers to watch content to the best capabilities of the device, and they want their content to be displayed properly.'

Currently consumers can't accurately recreate the cinema experience at home, because there is no P3 colour, he says. 'We have to qualify whatever the content is mastered to. At the moment it's all Rec. 709, but as we move towards UHD Blu-ray, which is BT. 2020 or P3 in a BT. 2020 wrapper, then we're going to qualify that.'

But there remain significant technicalities to be sorted, he warns. 'The new Panasonic panels are very close to DCI P3. UHD Blu-ray content will have a flag for wider colour gamut P3, so it's more than likely the TV will go into a P3 mode. But there's also a Rec. 709 flag. A screen may be 98 per cent DCI P3, but if the metadata it returns to the source device, the EDID, says 'give me Rec. 709' that's what you'll get on screen. It's up to Panasonic and THX to work with the studios to give the best presentation. Once UHD BD comes out we want all our 4K-certified TVs to be able to create P3 colour.' But at the moment he says there's no guarantee that'll happen.

Most of the time, television manufacturers don't even talk to us, says Okada. 'They'll have some crazy setting so that it stands out from other manufacturers, like you're in Times Square. You're not seeing the intricacies and progression of images from start to end. When we master for smaller screens, we're retaining the intention of what we had on the big screen, so that the audience at home still gets that full experience.'

For the record, I really like *Let's Be Cops*. Just not in Cinema mode ■

Panasonic's flagship CX802 Ultra HD TV employs a Wide Colour Phosphor panel





Just a few of our recent accolades



Best Home Cinema Over £100k **Highly Commended** 2013
 Best Home Cinema £40k-100k **Highly Commended** 2015
 Best Home Cinema under £40,000 **Winner** 2011, 2015



Best Home Cinema **Winner** 2014
 Most Professional AV Rack **Winner** 2014
 Dealer of the Year **Winner** 2014
 Best Lighting Project **Winner** 2015



Best Home Cinema **Winner** 2015
 Most Outstanding Entry Winner's **Winner** 2015



Home
Acoustics
Alliance
Certified



© Imaging
Science
Foundation
Certified



Home Cinema Excellence

At The Big Picture, we specialise in crafting bespoke installations of high-quality audio-visual and home automation equipment.

As one of only a handful of established UK companies offering a full service from start to finish, we take complete responsibility for every aspect of your project, from design to installation. The products we provide are at the forefront of audio-visual design and innovation - this is at the heart of all we do.

Our multi-award-winning experts and engineers pride themselves on their impeccable attention to detail and appreciation of aesthetics. With over a decade of experience, you can trust us to provide excellence in your home.

Call 01922 623000



@bigpictureci / www.getthebigpicture.co.uk





A TO Z

OF MOVIE CAR CHASES!

With the Blu-ray of *Fast & Furious 7* racing into stores, **Team HCC** celebrates the stuntmen, breathtaking sequences and iconic cars of home cinema history



A IS FOR... ANIMATION

There's a proud tradition of vehicular mayhem in animation. After all, it's much cheaper and far less dangerous to draw this sort of thing than it is to get people to do it for real.

The cliff-side pursuit in Hayao Miyazaki's *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979) and the climax of John Lasseter's *Toy Story* (1995) with Buzz and Woody riding a remote-control car deliver just as many high-octane thrills and spills as any Bond movie. Also, animation provides scope to easily correct things for future releases. Consider the car crash from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) that ends with Jessica Rabbit being pitched out of Benny the Cab. When the Laserdisc release allowed fans to pause it and discover that animators had drawn her sans underwear in two frames, Disney reanimated the sequence (twice) to preserve Jessica's modesty in subsequent DVD and Blu-ray versions.

B IS FOR... THE BLUES BROTHERS

As well as its triumphant tunes, John Landis' 1980 musical comedy boasts two of the biggest and most destructive car chases ever committed to celluloid. Between its pursuit through a shopping mall and the epic finale on the streets of Chicago, the filmmakers wrecked a total of 102 cars (including 60 police vehicles) – a world record at the time. A belated sequel in 2000 repeated the trick with a chucklesome minute-long multi-car smash. Shame the other 122 minutes were short on laughs.

C IS FOR... CRASHES

Whether it happens during a chase to highlight the dangers faced by the main players, or is used to provide a spectacular end to the action, the crash is a vital cog in the car chase machine – and the sounds of twisting metal and exploding fuel tanks make for ripe home cinema fodder. One problem: the more destructive they are, the more likely it is the car won't actually be driven by anyone at all. Film pedants love to point out the empty seats as cars take a tumble. Don't be one of those, though. It's annoying.

D IS FOR... DRIVING LESSONS

Learning to drive is a dangerous business in the world of Hollywood movies, because you may just become mixed up in a high-speed police chase that leaves a trail of destruction in its wake.

Our favourite example comes from *The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!* (1988), where a driving instructor tells the learner at the wheel of a car Frank Drebin has commandeered, 'Now normally, you would not be going 65 down the wrong way of a one-way street', before teaching his student the most important hand-signal of them all.

E IS FOR... ELEVATED TRAIN

William Friedkin's acclaimed 1971 crime thriller *The French Connection* has a sequence that finds New York detective 'Popeye' Doyle (Gene Hackman) hurtling through the streets in a Pontiac LeMans in pursuit of a hitman trying to escape on the city's iconic elevated train. It's now the stuff of



E... 'Popeye' Doyle takes his eyes off the road in *The French Connection*

legend, particularly the at-times haphazard choreography that resulted in unintentional collisions, and the lack of permission that caused the participation of several unsuspecting members of the public. Breathtaking and reckless, Friedkin has since said that he wouldn't try anything like it now. And he wouldn't be allowed to, either.

F IS FOR... FAST & FURIOUS

An obvious one, really – no film series in the last decade has put more automotive crash-bang-wallop action on screen, with each instalment striving to up the ante. This now means that the newest flick (reviewed on p98) can feature a sequence with parachuting cars and no one bats an eyelid. Choosing a favourite chase from the seven movies is a hard task, but we're currently revelling in the tank sequence from *Fast & Furious 6*, partly because... it features a tank.

G IS FOR... GRAND THEFT AUTO

Vehicular crime is the cornerstone of many a movie car chase – perhaps the most famous example being 1974's *Gone in 60 Seconds*. Made for a paltry \$150,000, writer-producer-director-actor H.B. Halicki's cult film deals with a group of thieves hired to steal 48 specific cars in just five days. What makes it memorable is the final act, a 40-minute(!) pursuit that covers six Californian cities and involved the destruction of nearly 100 vehicles.

These days, of course, GTA forms the basis of one of the world's most popular (and controversial) videogame series, which allows players to experience the thrill of re-enacting their favourite movie car chases with no risk of any physical danger, apart from a bit of thumb-ache.

H IS FOR... HAL NEEDHAM

The first of three stunt pros in this list, Hal Needham was of the most prominent stuntmen of the 1960s. Yet he didn't remain the go-to guy when fast driving was required – he actually wrote the script for *Smokey and the Bandit*, presenting it to his friend Burt Reynolds (Needham had long been his stunt double) and securing his >





I... 'Gotta get a bloomin move on... Babadab-babadabadab-bab-ba'



J... Flipping heck! Stuntman Jim Wilkey works his magic on *The Dark Knight*

involvement. The film, which Needham also directed, proved to be a box office hit – it was the fourth highest-grossing release of 1977 in the US. Following this initial success, Needham went on to cement his status as the master of the modern car chase by directing Reynolds in *Smokey and the Bandit II* (1980), *The Cannonball Run* (1981) and *Cannonball Run II* (1984).

IS FOR... THE ITALIAN JOB

More than just the source for endless Michael Caine quotes ('You were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off'), this quintessential slice of '60s British filmmaking climaxes with one of the all-time classic car chases as the robbers load up three Mini Coopers with stolen gold and try to escape from Turin. As well as busy streets, the trio of nimble automobiles also manoeuvre their way through shopping arcades, down sewers and even onto the roof-top test track of the old Fiat Lingotto Factory. It's a Mini adventure...

IS FOR... JIM WILKEY

Hollywood stunt driver Jim Wilkey has more than 200 credits to his name, including stunts behind the wheel in films as diverse as *Christine* (1983), *Two Moon Junction* (1988), *Mo' Money* (1992), *Mars Attacks!* (1996), *Lethal Weapon 4* (1998), *2 Fast 2 Furious* (2003) and *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014). However, his most iconic stunt among home cinema fans is surely the truck flip he crafted for the end of the Batmobile/Batpod chase in 2008's superhero sequel *The Dark Knight*. It's a feat that always leaves us boggle-eyed.

K IS FOR... KEYSTONE COPS

Cinema was in its earliest stages when Mack Sennett founded Keystone Studios – 1912 to be exact – and introduced movie-goers to the slapstick antics of the Keystone Cops. These bumbling bobbies were always chasing after suspected criminals and causing plenty of comic mayhem as they went. Even if they didn't create the idea of the movie car chase (and some still argue they did), the Keystone Cops played a significant role

K... The Keystone Cops helped pioneer the art of the movie car chase



M... Michael Bay delivers some more 'Bayhem'

in establishing its visual vocabulary. Pick up the *Mack Sennett Collection: Vol. 1* from indie label Flicker Alley (Region-free US Blu-ray) for an education.

IS FOR... LUC BESSON

This French director/producer never shies away from some pedal-on-metal action, and is responsible for two franchises (*Taxi* and *The Transporter*) that feature some of the best wheelwork in the business. And a Besson car chase is easy to spot, as it's typically shot through with pulsating music and a sense of humour – think of the Peugeot police car pile-up in *Taxi 2* (2000). Even his recent sci-fi thriller *Lucy* (2014) found time for a pavement-riding escapade in Paris, with Scarlet Johansson's character bending the rules a tad by using her telekinesis to throw traffic out of the way.

M IS FOR... MICHAEL BAY

If there's one Hollywood director you can count on to put a car chase into every film he makes, it's Michael Bay. No matter the plot (terrorists take control of Alcatraz; a man discovers he's a clone destined to be used as an organ donor; cops investigating the flow of drugs into Miami; giant alien robots bring their war to Earth) he always finds a way to cram in a bout of high-octane lunacy – preferably involving several explosions and the destruction of at least one extremely expensive motor. Heck, Bay was clearly so proud of the chase sequence he shot for *The Island* (2005) that he felt compelled to show off footage from it again in *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011).

MAKE YOUR HOLLYWOOD DREAMS A REALITY.



Home Cinema design,
installation and calibration

Home automation
and lighting control

Multi-room audio and video
distribution



sevenintegration.co.uk

01306 621144

info@sevenintegration.co.uk

@sevenint

sevenintegration

N IS FOR... NO CGI

Given the risks involved in stunt driving (and the insurance costs), it's no wonder that Hollywood has adopted computer-generated visual effects to help embellish its car chases. Yet many film fans argue the use of CGI diminishes the realism (and the 'how did they do that?' enjoyment) of such moments – something that has led to a return of practical stunt work in the likes of *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *Need for Speed* (2014). It's safe to say that the results speak for themselves.

O IS FOR... ONCOMING TRAFFIC

One easy way to raise the stakes is to send your drivers speeding into oncoming traffic. We say 'easy', but in truth these are dangerous sequences for filmmakers to pull off due to the increased risk of accidents, requiring precise planning at every stage.

While it's an idea that has been used countless times over the decades, we've yet to see anything that can top the audacity of such a scene from *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985). Lensed by William Friedkin (him again), it forms the closing beats to an edge-of-your-seat five-minute car chase, and finds William Petersen's Secret Service agent ignoring traffic signs and weaving through traffic as he drives the wrong way along an L.A. freeway. Equal parts thrilling and terrifying.

P IS FOR... POST-APOCALYPSE

If there was one thing that 1980s cinema taught us, it's that in the aftermath of a nuclear war new societies that rise from the ashes will fall prey to gangs of psycho-punks navigating the wastelands in tooled-up automobiles.

The most famous example being George Miller's *Mad Max* franchise, which made a spectacular return to the silver screen earlier this year after a gap of 30 years with *Mad Max: Fury Road* (see p14). However, it's the second film in the series, *The Road Warrior*, that earned it a place in movie history, with a spectacular multi-vehicle desert chase that inspired countless poorly-dubbed Italian imitators.

P... It's the end of the world as we know it!



Q... 007's Quartermaster created some of cinema's most famous cars



S... Bullitt reveals the highs and lows of driving around San Francisco



T... You'll never look at trucks the same way again after watching Duel

Q IS FOR... Q

Although the Daniel Craig years have put a dampener on some of the more fanciful ideas (he drove a Ford Mondeo in *Casino Royale*), James Bond's R&D boss has a history of dishing out cars to play with that offer plenty of after-market adjustments. *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) features a white Lotus Esprit than can be driven underwater, *The Living Daylights* (1987) has an Aston Martin Vantage replete with skis, lasers and a rocket motor, and *Die Another Day* (2002) includes a car (another Aston Martin) with an invisibility cloak. Just try to remember where you parked it.

R IS FOR... RONIN

Aficionados of car craft accept the fact that the best scenes don't always occur in the best movies. 1998's *Ronin* is a case in point: a middling, workmanlike France-set thriller spruced up by some astonishing automotive set-pieces shot on location in Paris and Nice. Director John Frankenheimer shows a masterly hand in orchestrating an army of stunt drivers, and both sequences are edited in a way that lets the driving do the talking. The rasping engines and squealing rubber burst forth from the Blu-ray's DTS-HD 5.1 mix, too. *C'est magnifique!*

S IS FOR... SAN FRANCISCO

With its two gigantic bridges, tram cars and roller coaster roads (the city is sited upon more than 40 hills), SF is the place to go if you want to stage a chase with a scenic backdrop. Think Steve McQueen tearing around in a Ford Mustang in *Bullitt* (1968), Sean Connery causing carnage in a Humvee in *The Rock* (1996), even David Caruso getting stuck in a Chinatown parade in mega-flop *Jade* (1995) – plus more from *48 Hrs*, *Magnum Force* and TV series *The Streets of San Francisco*.

Perhaps aware of over-saturation, Hollywood now seems to have ditched the up-and-down street action in favour of staging scenes of destruction on the Golden Gate Bridge (*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, *Godzilla*, *Terminator Genisys*).

T IS FOR... TRUCKS

Bigger vehicles = bigger crashes and explosions, hence cinema's love affair with trucks. James Cameron is a notable fan, giving big-wheeled beasts starring roles in both his *Terminator* movies, even driving one off a bridge in 1991's *T2*. And with a clever director involved, a truck can have a life of its own. Steven Spielberg's movie *Duel* (1971) keeps the driver offscreen, making the dust-caked Peterbilt tanker truck the true villain of the piece. It even roars when it falls over a cliff.

U IS FOR... UNDERCRANKING

A technique developed during the earliest days of filmmaking (back when film was run through a camera by manually turning a handle), undercranking is the method of making the film advance through the camera slower than usual. This means that when the footage is played back at the correct speed, it's sped up – a trick that has

proved very useful for moviemakers who want to make car chases look even more zippy.

Check out the finale of *The French Connection* (see 'E is for...' above) for a brilliant example of undercranking in action.

V IS FOR... VIRTUAL REALITY

The *Tron* franchise introduced audiences to the idea of vrooming around inside a computer-generated world in 1982 with its dazzling Lightcycle sequence, and upped the spectacle even further with 2010's 3D-showcase *Tron: Legacy*. Yet for the best VR thrills, revisit the Wachowskis' first *Matrix* sequel. One of the most elaborate chases ever filmed, this stunt-packed sequence took three months to shoot using a purpose-built 1.5-mile stretch of three-lane road. General Motors donated 300 cars for the duo to obliterate – useful, as even though the *Matrix* isn't real, the shopping bill would have been.

W IS FOR... WHEELMEN

Professional getaway drivers are familiar figures in crime flicks, but it was Walter Hill's 1978 thriller *The Driver* that put them under the spotlight. This stripped-down film stars Ryan O'Neal as 'The Driver' opposite Bruce Dern as 'The Detective', and packs in some coolly-choreographed car rides as their cat and mouse relationship spirals out of control. A flop upon its original release, *The Driver's* reputation has grown considerably over the decades, and its influence on films like Nicolas Winding Refn's acclaimed 2011 neo-noir *Drive* – not to mention *The Transporter* series – are clear to see.

X IS FOR... XXX

Vin Diesel followed up *The Fast and the Furious* (2001) with this 2002 actioner about extreme sports enthusiast-turned-reluctant spy Xander Cage. Our hero demonstrates a penchant for driving cars off bridges before parachuting out of them, and then shows some pretty 'rad' skills behind the wheel of a Pontiac GTO when it's time to chase down and harpoon a deadly drone. A terrible sequel starring Ice Cube followed in 2005.

Y IS FOR... 'YEE-HAW!'

Jumps. All the best chases have 'em. And, if you're loveable airheads the Dukes of Hazzard, you perform them while tootin' your horn and screaming 'Yee-haw'. That TV show made a name for itself courtesy of its frequent automobile aerobatics, and there are similar movie moments that stick long in the memory – none more so than the barrel-roll in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), a classic stunt slightly marred by the use of a slide whistle sound effect. Oh well.

Z IS FOR... ZOË BELL

Don't be fooled into thinking that the car chase is the sole preserve of men. Having proved her mettle stunt-doubling for the likes of Lucy Lawless, Uma Thurman and Sharon Stone, Zoë Bell moved into the limelight when she was picked by Quentin Tarantino to play one of the leads in his film *Death Proof* (2007). A smart choice, as the nerve-crunching finale required Bell to hang off the front of a speeding Dodge Challenger while being pursued by Kurt Russell's automotive psycho. Don't try this at home, kids ■



V... It may not be 'real', but a crash in the *Matrix* will still prove fatal



W... Ryan Gosling plays a stunt driver turned wheelman in neo-noir *Drive*

Y... Going airborne always sets the pulses racing





**AND
THE GEEK
SHALL INHERIT
THE EARTH**

Despite the growing number of similar conventions around the world, the San Diego Comic-Con remains the most popular of its ilk, drawing crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

Scott Snowden dons a cape to round up the gossip from the 2015 SDCC

SUNSHINE DRENCHES THE Californian city of San Diego as it bathes in the glow of another glorious Summer day. Only now, in mid-July, the streets of the old Gas Lamp District are packed with people in spandex rather than swimwear. Comic-Con has arrived and the carnival is in full swing.

Every year the San Diego Convention Center is filled to near bursting point with fans and followers of everything associated with science-fiction, superheroes, cult movies and comic books. Yet Comic-Con is not only a gathering of all things geek. It has become by far the biggest single cinematic event in terms of news and announcements. Yes, it focuses on the sci-fi, fantasy, and comic genres and you might think that doesn't relate to you, but we all dip into this world, whether we realise it or not. Batman, Spider-Man, the X-Men, Superman, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* are in this category – and everyone has watched at least one of these. Possibly only the Academy Awards puts more movie stars in one place.

Studio no-shows

There are always big announcements at Comic-Con, and many studios use this enormous event to show off new trailers and promote forthcoming flicks. This year was a little different, however, as Marvel/Disney, Paramount and Sony had all announced they would not be in attendance before the doors opened. The official word was that the date of this year's convention wasn't compatible with their cinematic timelines. Possibly, but Marvel/Disney could have held an *Ant-Man* panel to generate hype for the movie's opening one week later, Paramount might have teased *Star Trek* and Sony could have revved up the marketing machine for the new Bond movie. But it was not to be.

Consequently, this left the 'Best in Show' award open to a bar room-style brawl between Warner Bros., Twentieth Century Fox and Disney, represented by *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, *Suicide Squad*, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Deadpool* and, of course, *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens*.

Warner Bros treated the 6,000 fans squeezed into Hall H to the new trailer for *Batman vs Superman* (due next Summer) and a panel with director Zack Snyder and stars Ben Affleck, Henry Cavill, Gal Gadot, Amy Adams, Jesse Eisenberg, Jeremy Irons and Holly Hunter. Not a bad lineup, but there were times when Affleck and Eisenberg really didn't look like they were enjoying the experience.

Director David Ayer took the stage to introduce *Suicide Squad*, and immediately took a swipe at Marvel. 'I'm not trying to start an East Coast/West Coast feud with Marvel, but... DC has the best villains,' he boasted, alluding to next year's movie that collects The Joker, Deadshot, Harley Quinn et al. Ayer played to the crowd, saying they were the



engine that makes everything run. But his studio still has hearts and minds to win as it embraces the darker tone of the DC universe to differentiate itself from Marvel at every opportunity.

Twentieth Century Fox rolled out everything in one go with new trailers and stars from *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Fantastic 4* and *Deadpool*, including appearances from Jennifer Lawrence, Michael Fassbender, Hugh Jackman, Nicholas Hoult and James McAvoy, showcasing a shaved head. It's safe to say that while the R-rated footage from *Deadpool* blew everyone's socks off, the new material for the *Fantastic Four* was quickly forgotten. A surprise appearance from Stan Lee sweetened the deal.

And then there was *Star Wars*. Disney knew it would have Hall H in the palm of its hand, so its control of the practically salivating crowd was never in question. Rumours were circulating that fans might be treated to a new trailer, instead they got Carrie Fisher, Harrison Ford and Mark Hamill on stage>



Twentieth Century Fox promoted a slate of films, including *Fantastic 4*

Suicide Squad: 'DC has the best villains,' says director David Ayer



32 SAN DIEGO COMIC-CON

and a two-minute montage of behind-the-scenes clips and snippets. Then *Force Awakens* helmer J.J. Abrams said everyone was invited to an enormous, outdoor concert celebrating the music of *Star Wars* performed by the San Diego Symphony. Those who stormtrooped off to the outdoor amphitheatre were given a lightsaber in the colour of their choice – reward, perhaps, for the 14-18-hour queue time to get into the *Star Wars* panel in the first place.

Meanwhile, the hall was close to empty and poor Kevin Smith, through no fault of his own, was left as the next act on stage with little more than tumbleweed as he tried to muster enthusiasm for his new horror flick *Yoga Hosers* and his forthcoming *Mallrats* sequel *Mallrats*.

Drinking it all in

So, aside from not getting a new *Star Wars* trailer, what was the rest of Comic-Con like? Geek heaven. The city is gripped in a Mardi Gras-style mood, with stores, restaurants and bars celebrating the pop-culture carnival. Thirsty? Comic-Con themed drink menus offer Pan-Galactic Gargleblasters, Klingon blood wine and Romulan ale. Fans and photographers form huge lines outside random restaurants whenever a big star is about to emerge and seemingly every corner of every street for a mile radius from the Conference Center is packed with performers, promotional stands and photo opportunities. Cosplayers, from Judge Dredd to *Scooby-Doo*'s Shaggy, abound.

And the best treats aren't necessarily the huge, hyped events that attract thousands, but the ones held in smaller venues with just a few hundred dedicated disciples. Two such examples were the *Star Trek Renegades* and *Star Trek Axanar* panels, both must-see events for every Trekkie worth their tricorder. These crowd-funded movies have attracted a number of people associated with the franchise, including Walter Koenig, George Takei, and Robert Picardo, and perhaps point to a future path of film production.

In addition, Comic-Con hosts discussions and seminars on virtually every aspect of filmmaking. At the Digital Bits Blu-ray panel, DVD and Blu-ray producers, including Charles de Lauzirika (the man responsible for the lavish *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* release) and Cliff Stephenson (*The Hunger*



Comic-Con was the place to be for *Star Wars* fans...

...with speeders and Stormtroopers all putting in an appearance



Games) held court on the potential of the imminent Ultra HD Blu-ray format, and were hardly upbeat about its commercial viability, lamenting that the success of both DVD and streaming has made souped-up packaged media a harder sell.

'DVD got far more successful than anybody knew it would be,' said Stephenson. 'It turned people from collectors to consumers. They bought stuff just to buy stuff and that boosted sales. Then you go to Blu-ray which became much more collector driven, so the people who didn't want to buy every single title weren't buying every single title. The studios looked at that as not as successful, when the reality is it's as successful as Laserdisc was 20 years ago, even more so. 'The studios need to learn their lessons from Blu-ray as they begin to market new 4K Ultra HD products.' ■

Award-winning home cinemas

At Cyberhomes our home cinemas aren't just about the amazing picture and jaw-dropping sound. We also implement the acoustic treatments, lighting control, the seating, the intuitive control system from Savant or Control4, and so much more.

For details visit www.cyberhomes.co.uk/hcc



Home cinema design and installation • Lighting control systems • Multi-room audio and video • Home automation
CCTV and security • Data and communication networks • Occupancy simulation • Smart climate control

0333 344 3718

hello@cyberhomes.co.uk

www.cyberhomes.co.uk

Never has **top quality** home cinema seating been **so affordable**



FrontRow™ Classic Seating from £685.00

- Modular design for curved and straight seating configurations
- Large Range of Fabrics and Leather options
- Black leather available from stock
- Optional drinks trays and cup holders

NEW!

FrontRow™ Modern Seating

- Straight and corner configurations
- Full Leather or Fabric
- Large selection of colours
- Two tone colour options
- Manual or electric recliners
- Adjustable headrests
- Prices from £510.00



All **FrontRow™** seating include a space-maximising inclining mechanism that allows seating to be placed close to a wall and include a comprehensive 5 year warranty including accidental damage. A free design service is available to ensure the seating configuration is suitable for your room.

For further information please call: 01892 552561 or visit www.frontrow-seating.co.uk

FrontRow™ Home Cinema Seating, 69 London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0PA

System that hits for six!

Mark Craven reports on a Dolby Atmos theatre that helps an international sports star relax in style...

KIT CHECKLIST

ARTCOUSTIC: 3 x Artcoustic Spitfire SL 16-8s;
2 x Artcoustic Spitfire Control 2 subwoofers;
4 x Artcoustic Target SLs; 4 x Artcoustic
Architect 2-1 SLs

JVC: D-ILA X700 projector

OPPO: Blu-ray player

DENON: AVR-X7200W receiver

CONTROL 4: Lighting, switching, control

SCREEN RESEARCH: 130in acoustically
transparent projector screen

CINE ITALIA SEATING: 2 x Lusso daybeds;
4 x Sedi reclining cinema seats



TO PARAPHRASE THE words of Loyd Grossman, 'Who watches movies in a cinema room like this?' The answer: England cricket legend Kevin Pietersen, when he's not terrorising opposition bowlers all over the world, of course.

A projector-based system with a 7.2.4 Dolby Atmos speaker array and luxurious styling, it gives 'KP' and his family the perfect space to relax and enjoy films, TV and sports.

Audio that'll bowl you over

The room was designed and installed by Hertfordshire-based outfit Q Smartdesign, and uses Artcoustic speakers and Denon amplification. The latter's top-flight AVR-X7200W receiver offers Dolby Atmos decoding and will support DTS:X in the future, while the Artcoustic array includes a pair of 2 x 10in subwoofers and in-ceiling speakers for those all-important height channels.

The cricketer and his family's busy schedule meant demos weren't an option. 'So we showed them some previous projects and worked out the best options for their needs, from tested and proven hardware used on other projects which we knew would produce,' explains designer and installer Ben Abbott.

Before its transformation into a bigscreen sports and movie mecca, the space was used as a dining room, roughly square in shape and with a large window. The design almost left Q Smartdesign stumped. 'Kevin was adamant on having two rows of seats, meaning a tiered seating plan, but being a fairly short room the step had to be bigger than originally thought so every seat had perfect viewing.' Consultation with seating specialist Cine Italia, and Artcoustic, enabled them to achieve the right seats and angles – the room uses both 'daybeds' and dedicated cinema recliners, as befits a family space that's about more than just lights-off filmic fun. >



Owzat for a stylish cinema room?



Although they working alongside other trades in the house (renovations including a new kitchen and extension were being completed), the install time was as quick as one month. As well as the cinema, new cabling was run for HD video/audio distribution around the property, and CCTV installed.

A Control 4 system oversees the hardware in the movie den and beyond – ease of use was paramount. Both an iPad and dedicated remote control make this a 'touch-of-a-button' affair.

The largescreen visuals come from a JVC D-ILA X700 projector, which uses its 4K e-Shift technology to increase the pixel density of HD sources, which include an Oppo Blu-ray player, Apple TV and Sky HD. A 130in Screen Research projector screen dominates the front wall, surrounded by bespoke cabinets that house hardware and provide storage. The slim form factor of the in-wall Artcoustic speakers was vital in ensuring everything could be accommodated in the space while retaining a clean look. All cabling

is, naturally, hidden from sight, while downlighters provide discreet illumination.

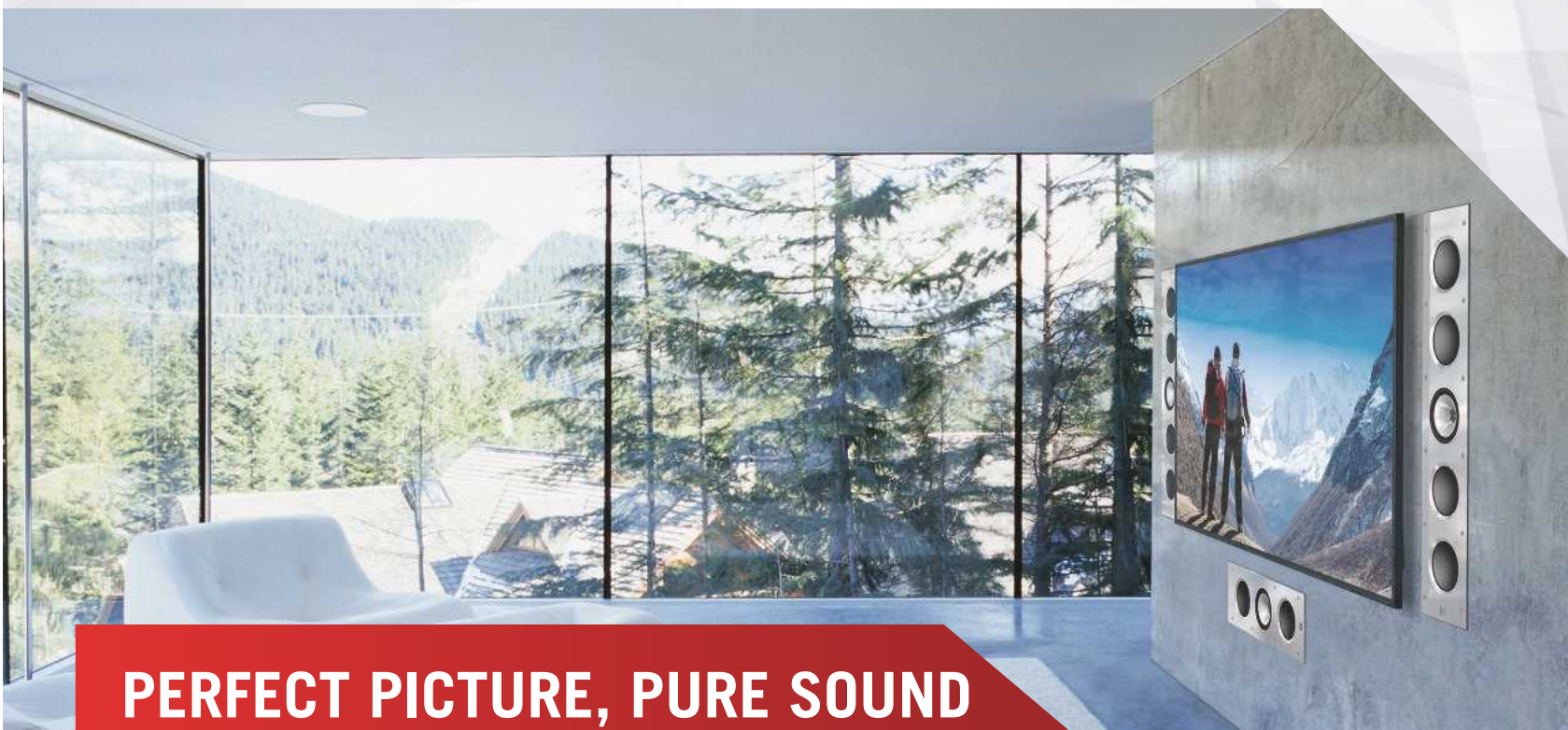
Winning system

Q Smartdesign reveals that the feedback from Kevin and his family has been 'great', that the room is getting plenty of use, and that it has now installed another Artcoustic on-wall speaker system in the property's living room. So it sounds like Kevin has truly caught the home cinema bug *[that's enough cricket puns now – Ed]* ■





HARPENDEN • EDGWARE • BECKENHAM



PERFECT PICTURE, PURE SOUND

With 3 showrooms, 7 demonstration rooms, expertise, experience, patience and professionalism, for the very best in Home Entertainment there's no better destination than Musical Images. Featuring all the latest Home Cinema stars; **Pioneer's** acclaimed Blu-ray Players and Receivers and **KEF's** space saving Ci in wall speakers, we promise every customer the finest retail and installation experience

Pioneer
BDP 170
Blu-ray Player
SC LX88
Flagship Amp



KEF
INNOVATORS IN SOUND

Ci in wall
speakers

Ci3160RL-THX
Ci5160-RL-THX
Ci4100QL

Ci SERIES

HIDE YOUR SPEAKERS, NOT YOUR SOUND



3 times award winner
HOME CINEMA CHOICE
"Best Multiroom Installation"

Check out our NEW website
www.musical-images.co.uk

musical images
 @musical_images

Musical Images Showrooms

126 High Street, Beckenham, Kent BR3 1EB
020 8663 3777 beckenham@musicalimages.co.uk

173 Station Road, Edgware, Middlesex HA8 7JX
020 8952 5535 edgware@musicalimages.co.uk

82 High Street, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2SP
01582 764246 harpenden@musicalimages.co.uk

Opening times - 9.30am to 5.30pm

**HIFI • HOME CINEMA • MULTIROOM AUDIO • HOME AUTOMATION
LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS • A/V DESIGN & CONSULTANCY**

Audio Visual Lifestyle Ltd trading as Musical Images. Finance options available, subject to status. E&OE



MERIDIAN



CUSTOM
ELECTRONIC
DESIGN &
INSTALLATION
ASSOCIATION

Superb, authentic and lifelike sound.

Comprehensive design and specification service:
Call 0330 1346931 or email design@meridian.co.uk for details.

REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **MONITOR AUDIO** Retooled Gold Series speakers **SONY** Android-powered 55in 4K TV **QUADRAL** Floorstanding mid-range 5.1 speaker system **HUMAX** YouView + Ultra HD in a 1TB PVR **PANASONIC** Flagship 5.1-channel soundbar/subwoofer **PHILIPS** Fidelio soundbase speaker **ROUNDUP** A quartet of bargain-priced Blu-ray players do battle **AND MORE**

The 4K sweet spot

Does Samsung's UE55JS8500 4K TV offer the perfect blend of price and performance? See page 44

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

Adam Rayner goes digging for home cinema thrills with Monitor Audio's Gold series

Precious metals!

MONITOR AUDIO'S NEW Gold series is both big and clever. With voluminous cabinets showcasing ten years of evolution, it continues to uphold the brand's reputation as one of the true greats in British loudspeaker manufacturing.

The company makes a wide range of speakers, offering two types of soundbar, skinny speakers to nestle neatly next to your TV, in-wall framed-grille lifestyle speakers and different scale sub/sat packages called Mass, Radius and Apex. Its 'separates' models begin at Bronze, then progress through Silver, Gold and Platinum. The rarer the metal, the better the speaker. The Bronze line sells by the bucket-load, to the point where Monitor Audio produces a step-up series called Monitor Reference. All in all, twelve different kinds of speakers. Mind you, they are all award-winners. So no pressure on the designers of this set, then...

For me, this very-nearly-the-top-but-not-quite range represents peak value for money, since you get most of the premium engineering that Monitor Audio has devised without having to pay for the privilege of owning the Platinum flagships.

AV INFO

PRODUCT: High-end 5.1 array with dipole/monopole surrounds

POSITIONING: Above Gold, there is only Platinum...

PEERS: B&W 800 Series; KEF R Series; PMC Twenty Series

Built for both worlds

One of the clever things about the Gold line is how you can configure and use the speakers either as a hi-fi purist or with the slightly different matter of movie soundtrack playback in mind. This is evidenced by two signal paths through the W15 subwoofer (one stereo feed, the other an LFE mono input) plus the Movie/Music/Impact/OFF EQ curve positions of its DSP; and the ability to control auto-switching of the surround FX speakers from dipole to monopole use via a 12V trigger, of which more later. >



'Monitor Audio's Gold 300AV grasps you by the senses and drags you right into a movie with ease'



Monitor Audio offers the Gold Series in a dark walnut veneer, lustrous white or black lacquers and a rich Ebony wood piano finish. The latter adds a chunk to the cost (£1,300, in fact). The suggested package price of our black lacquer system is a shade over £7,000.

The stars of the show, visually, are the three-way rear-ported floorstanders, called Gold 300. The Gold C350 centre speaker isn't exactly small either. Finishing off the array is the massively dense W15 subwoofer (25mm-thick woodwork all round) and those Gold FX surrounds. The latter have six drivers in them and are designed to be wall-mounted. In monopole use only the front-facing midbass driver and tweeter are employed. Go to dipole mode (either manually via the front switch or via 12V trigger) and the side-mounted drivers come into play (the front tweeter is deactivated in this instance). Dipole will be the weapon of choice for those who like a THX-style diffuse soundfield, particularly when used in a 7.1 setup. While I acknowledge that the Gold FX is damned clever, my personal preference would be to run a pair of the bigger monopole bookshelf designs, the Gold 100s, as I'm a sucker for full surround directivity, *a la* IMAX.

Pistons at the ready

Onto the driver tech. The C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium) cones of the mid and bass units in the main speakers are a bonded composite. Ceramic has very low bend or stretch, and when molecularly-bonded to the metal layer that has massive inherent rigidity of its own, it makes a tremendous piston. Hence the drivers' RST (Rigid Surface Technology) branding. That the metal is not just aluminium but is alloyed with the softer but lighter magnesium means it makes a lower moving mass cone assembly.

For this iteration, the cone profile has been tweaked with the central concavities seen on the previous GR and GS models enhanced to the shape of a continuous radiating dish. There's now a longer voice coil working behind the scenes, and a larger motor overall with greater excursion, which MA says has improved driver efficiency and lowered distortion.

I particularly like the C-CAM ribbon tweeter. Such high-frequency drivers are often able to reach so far beyond normal hearing ranges that the overtones and harmonics that do get into recordings of all kinds are relevant. Monitor Audio's latest generation has been constructed to a closer tolerance than ever, which makes a difference with the micro-engineering of high-frequency units. They're claimed to reach 60kHz and are meticulously pair-matched.

The Gold Series grilles are now midi-length, held on by embedded neodymium magnets. More of the lush cabinetry can therefore be seen. A good thing, as the finish is superb.



The centre and front L/R speakers use ribbon tweeters, but the side drivers of the FX speakers are dome designs

The drivers each employ bolt-through fixings. These are cabinet-deep and the back bolt fixing shows as a nubbin of metal on the rear of the enclosure. This technique ensures huge strength and rigidity, and – best of all – is used to decouple the driver from the front baffle, negating against smearing of leading edges by micro baffle-flex.

Monitor Audio isn't too proud to use someone else's DSP for its subwoofers' in-room control. I have used many of these systems and they vary enormously in efficacy and ease of use. This one, dubbed LEO from D2 Audio, is über-slick – plug in the mic, press one button and wait while its test tones detect room mode issues and the DSP applies a correction frequency curve.

Robot wars

For this review, I broke the seal on my Blu-ray of Neill Blomkamp's *CHAPPIE*. I loved his

District 9 and despite its daftness, adored *Elysium*, too. *CHAPPIE* was slated by some reviewers but I think it's rather brilliant. I also revisited Dreamworks' *Turbo*. Deeply silly but lovely of soundtrack, like most animations.

In *CHAPPIE*, our protagonist gets involved in stealing cars. He heads out with the gangsters, played by members of Die Antwoord (a rugged Afrikaans-spitting rap act) to go thieving. As the sequence begins, a swell of bassline-infused rap music kicks in. As I'd already been immediately impressed by the clarity and power of the Gold 300AV package, this massive rise in bass weight and overall scale – and with no hint of any distortion or lack of linearity – caught me by surprise. What I had thought was big and clear up until then turned out to be the MA speakers just on tick over.

The ability to dig out a little incidental sound in the midst of a major crescendo shows the sheer class of this array. *CHAPPIE*

tosses his favourite toy, a squeaky rubber chicken, into the road in front of a Nissan Skyline before he car-jacks it (with hilariously inappropriate reasoning) – even gesticulating with the chicken as he throws the car owner into the weeds. Both the first and second ‘angrier’ squeaky-toy noises were portrayed with accuracy and presence, making the sequence as funny as it is meant to be.

MA's leaf tweeters offer enormous detail with no stridency at all. I tried the FX rears in dipole mode, but as that mutes said HF driver I soon found myself switching back to monopole. Even though the gold dome tweeters in the fore-and-aft faces of the FX surrounds are a stalwart of many a Monitor Audio speaker, they are outclassed here. Of course, the good news is that buyers can discover which presentation they like best.

With *Turbo*, I was surprised by how powerfully these surround speakers could play. They can really do it. The movie puts you on a racetrack with automobiles zooming through your viewing room. The power and speed of the sudden increase in engine noises was astonishing. As each Indy car comes from behind and out through the front, some on the left, then some on the right, the sound through the Gold system was almost a physical blow and terrifyingly realistic. And yet in the snail's tomato patch elsewhere in the movie, it was all about delicacy and detail at tiny background levels.

The three-way Gold C350 centre speaker does a truly full-scale job, and presents dialogue in its stride. Gunfire, shouting and breaking glass during *CHAPPIE*'s Johannesburg riot scene are rendered perfectly with no congestion. Impressive.

That film's soundtrack is filled with massive low-end drops. Being British, Monitor Audio only offers ‘real’ specifications, and says its subwoofer bottoms out at 18Hz. Utter twaddle, if you ask me. The box is sealed, the Class D power plant is rated at 650W RMS/1,200W peak and the 15in driver's suspension is very wobbly. I'd imagine it reaches single figures in Hz and with tight DSP EQ control, it feels as if there is no limit in depth. It easily pressurised my entire room.

Any which way you look at it...

So, the Gold 300AV array costs plenty but offers enormity. It has might and it has clarity. It can play sweet and linear at low levels or it can frighten the neighbours' neighbours. The sheer bandwidth on tap is amazing and in truth, after admiring the design and finish and a little experimentation with the sub's EQ settings, you will rapidly forget about the enclosures. The sound is immediately engaging, grasping you by the senses and dragging you into a movie with ease. With the Gold 300AV you get delicious performance in every direction. You could pay more and get less.

Best buy, easy ■



The Gold 300's rear port uses a rifled design to shift air out with speed

SPECIFICATIONS

GOLD 300

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium) ribbon tweeter; 1 x 4in C-CAM mid-range driver; 2 x 6.5in C-CAM bass drivers

ENCLOSURE: Three-way, rear-ported

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 30Hz-60kHz

SENSITIVITY: 90dB

POWER HANDLING: 200W

DIMENSIONS: 317(w) x 1,105(h) x 370(d)mm

WEIGHT: 27.2kg

GOLD C350

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x C-CAM ribbon tweeter; 1 x 4in C-CAM mid-range driver, 2 x 6.5in C-CAM bass drivers

ENCLOSURE: Three-way, sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 40Hz-60kHz

SENSITIVITY: 89dB

POWER HANDLING: 200W

DIMENSIONS: 581(w) x 254(h) x 360(d)mm

WEIGHT: 9.9kg

GOLD FX

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x C-CAM ribbon tweeter; 1 x 6.5in C-CAM bass driver, 2 x 1in C-CAM dome tweeters; 2 x 4in C-CAM mid-range drivers

ENCLOSURE: Two-way, sealed. Dipole or monopole

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 60Hz-60kHz

SENSITIVITY: 87dB

POWER HANDLING: 100W

DIMENSIONS: 390(w) x 310(h) x 168(d)mm

WEIGHT: 11.9kg

GOLD W15 (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 15in C-CAM rigid piston woofer

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 18Hz-40Hz/120Hz (according to setting)

ON BOARD POWER: 650W RMS, Class D amplifier controlled by D2 Audio DSP section

REMOTE CONTROL: Yes

DIMENSIONS: 400(w) x 430(h) x 400(d)mm

WEIGHT: 33.5kg

CONNECTIONS: Phono stereo input/output; LFE input/output; USB socket for firmware

HCC VERDICT

Monitor Audio Gold 300AV

→ £7,150 approx → www.monitoraudio.co.uk

→ Tel: 01268 740 580

HIGHS: Astonishing whole-system bandwidth from infrasonic to 'bat'; muscular sound; flexible setup; premium design and finish

LOWS: Costly; one of the best sub-bass DSPs around has a primitive display...

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



DRIVE ANGRY

Vin Diesel and pals hit the road in *Fast & Furious 7*, see p98

The UE55JS8500 is one of Samsung's more affordable 'SUHD' screens

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
55in UHD TV with edge LED lighting and HDR support

POSITIONING:
Below the 9500 and 9000 SUHD models

PEERS:
Sony KD-55X9305C;
LG 65UF950V;
Panasonic TX-55CX802

Although not as future-proof as its flagship SUHD TVs, this 55in Samsung feels cutting-edge to **John Archer**

Step down but still a step up

SAMSUNG'S RANGE OF so-called SUHD TVs may not really be the whole new category of television tech Samsung wants you to think they are, but there's no denying that rival brands are still scrabbling to catch up with one key technology SUHD introduced months ago: High Dynamic Range (HDR) pictures.

However, with HDR content essentially nonexistent right now, the 55in UE55JS8500 SUHD TV under scrutiny here will need to provide plenty of other attractions to make its £2,350 price tag seem worthwhile.

One possible such attraction – though it certainly won't appeal to everyone – is the set's design, which is strongly, unabashedly curved. My own experience suggests that the potential benefits of curved screens are directly related to the size of the screen in question, and the 55in panel here is not, actually, particularly large by today's standards. Still, the screen's thin dark grey frame accentuates the curve nicely, as well as standing in strong contrast to the shiny single-bar design of the desktop stand.

A hunt for connections on the UE55JS8500 introduces the One Connect Mini. This carries the TV's four HDMI inputs plus a couple of USBs, but unlike the full-sized One Connect boxes provided with Samsung's JS9000 and JS9500 models, it doesn't also carry any tuner inputs or the TV's processing brains. This means you can't just upgrade this display to accommodate future Samsung operating systems and features by adding a new-generation One Connect box.

What's so super about SUHD?

So, what is it about the UE55JS8500 that enables Samsung to call it an 'SUHD' TV? Firstly, as well as its HDR playback and 4K resolution, this curved beauty carries Samsung's Nano Crystal colour system, derived from Quantum Dot technology to deliver a wider colour gamut than normal LCD

TVs. SUHD models also use 10-bit panels for enhanced colour resolution and greyscale gradation, plus new ultra-transmissive LCD panels and an improved backlight to deliver bright pictures.

The illumination for the UE55JS8500 is placed at the TV's edges, rather than directly behind the screen as is the case with the flagship JS9500. The immediate step-up model – the JS9000 – also employs an edge LED array: the main difference between these two (aside from the One Connect Mini) is the UE55JS8500's less powerful processing engine (a quad-core affair versus the JS9000's octa-core one) and motion handling – here it's stated as 1900PQI (Samsung's own variation on the oft-abused Hz term) versus the JS9000's 2000PQI. Oh, and there's the small matter of an extra £500 on the ticket.

A last key feature to cover is the Smart system. Based on Samsung's Tizen OS, it feels like a bit of a work in progress at the moment, thanks to some missing features and the occasional bug. Yet it's certainly a much more user-friendly and content-focused system than Samsung has delivered before.

Not quite top-dog, but...

This TV's performance isn't as full-on spectacular as Samsung's JS9000 and especially JS9500 TVs, but still offers an outstanding picture for the money.

The star of the show is its contrast. Rich, deep black tones (by edge LED standards, at least) bed down with searing bright whites and punchy, saturated colours. These talents are especially welcome when you're watching >

Choose your weapon!
Samsung offers two remotes for the JS8500





The stand mirrors the curve of the TV

HDR material (as supplied for demo from Samsung on a USB drive), with its expanded luminance range versus the normal video standards we've been stuck with for decades.

My HDR clips (in 4K res) of *Life Of Pi* and *Exodus: Gods And Kings* again look incredible versus non-HDR TVs, with greater colour dynamics and contrast akin to the almost luminous quality of a high-quality digital cinema. The UE55JS8500 doesn't deliver the same sense of next-gen dynamism witnessed

'This Samsung offers a performance level and feature count that you won't be disappointed with'

on the direct LED JS9500, but it's still good enough to make the case that in some ways HDR is more impactful on your viewing experience than 4K resolution.

You'll be feeding this TV a different diet for a while, though. The good news is that vanilla HD and 4K material still impress. Piping in *Life Of Pi* in non-HDR 4K from last year's Samsung UHD Video pack reveals pictures that still look vibrant, sharp, packed with detail and strong in contrast.

Samsung deserves plaudits for the way its processing can expand the colour and contrast of pictures without making them look forced, unnatural or unbalanced. This TV can be set to deliver a rendition of the existing/old Rec. 709 standard if that's what you crave from a serious display, but it seems strange to me to pay so much for the UE55JS8500's advanced screen technology only to force it back into a Rec. 709 'box'. Especially when the set remasters non-HDR sources so effectively.

Tricky-to-handle *Life Of Pi* sequences, such as those during the storm that sinks Pi's family boat, reveal the UE55JS8500 to be good

at countering LCD motion blur problems.

The set avoids the smeary look to the rain and churning sea often evident with this sequence. And Samsung's motion processing suite, on its lowest setting, can be relied upon to increase fluid detail without artefact blight.

Watching the same scene, along with *Life Of Pi*'s more static opening shots, in HD rather than UHD also shows that Samsung's upscaling is better now than it was last year, reducing the slight tendency of the previous system to overcook sharpness.

Switching to 3D with *Pacific Rim* (I can't wait for the sequel...) continues the fun – even considering the TV doesn't ship with any free 3D glasses. Crosstalk is well contained and images look bright and colourful for a panel using active 3D technology. Meanwhile, that high contrast helps delineate a superb sense of 3D space and Samsung's upscaling engine brings detail to the movie's largescale fights that makes the action utterly absorbing.

My future's so bright...

No TV is totally perfect, though, and sure enough there are issues with the UE55JS8500. The main one is that you need to remove quite a bit of brightness from pictures to stop backlight clouding creeping into dark scenes – a requirement that reduces the screen's HDR potency and leads to some minor crushing of shadow detail in dark areas.

The curved screen distorts onscreen reflections too, while 3D playback exhibits more judder than I'd ideally like. The onboard audio, delivered by stereo drivers and twin woofers, is only fair-to-middling – there's a shortage of bass depth and a slightly indirect, muffled feeling during raucous fare.

But don't let this relatively minor run of negatives put you off. Yes, it is worth trying to move up to the more future-proofed Samsung 9 Series TV, but if your budget won't stretch that far, the UE55JS8500 delivers a performance level and feature count that you won't be disappointed with ■

ON THE MENU



→ The new-for-2015 Tizen-powered interface is user-friendly, with the overlaid icon bar providing access to VOD content, inputs and more

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active
4K: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160
TUNER: Yes. 2 x Freeview, 2 x satellite
CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; 3 x USB; tuner inputs; RGB Scart; component video; composite AV; Ethernet; optical digital audio output; headphone
SOUND: 2 x 10W, plus 2 x 10W woofers
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 600 Nits
CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): N/A
DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,240(w) x 712.8(h) x 91.5(d)mm
WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 20.9kg
FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; DLNA streaming; SUHD Remaster engine; 1900PQI motion processing; HDR playback; Tizen Smart engine, 10-bit panel; Nano Crystal colour system; Voice Control; Motion Control ready; screen mirroring

HCC VERDICT



Samsung UE55JS8500

→ £2,350 approx → www.samsung.co.uk

→ Tel: 0330 726 7864

HIGHS: Spectacular contrast- and colour-rich pictures; eye-catching design; unobtrusive Smart TV system; HDR support

LOWS: Clouding unless you restrain the backlight output; Smart system feels like a work in progress; curved screen distorts reflections; no 3D glasses supplied

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Mr Scott, energize! Who says you can't fly
in an armchair: **the Excite 5.1 system.**
All there is.



DYNAUDIO

Ed Selley finds out if Quadral's redesigned Rhodium range is worth an audition

Revamped and ready to rock?



A gloss white finish is also available

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Mid-range
multichannel
speaker package

POSITIONING:
Below the
Chromium Style

PEERS:
Monitor Audio Silver;
Pioneer S Series



HAILING FROM GERMANY, Quadral has been a presence in the UK market for some years, and in that time has delivered some rather fine speakers to the attention of *HCC*. Hoping to continue this trend is the Rhodium series.

This revised range sits below the flagship Aurum, Platinum and Chromium lines and is comprised of just four models, three of which you see here – the largest Rhodium 500 floorstander, the Rhodium 200 standmount and the Base 100 centre speaker. A smaller, more affordable Rhodium 400 floorstander is also available.

The entire range is built around a 1in aluminium dome tweeter. This makes the Rhodium speakers the most expensive in Quadral's stable to use a conventional dome – go any higher and treble is handled by the company's bespoke ribbon design.

The tweeter is partnered by polypropylene midbass drivers (ranging in size from 5in to 6.5in dependent on the speaker) that are coated in titanium – a process that results in an extremely stiff and strong diaphragm, and one that looks rather smart, too.

Aesthetic overhaul

Adding to the good looks is the new cabinet design. I never came across the old Rhodiums, but Quadral is generous enough to leave information about discontinued speakers on its website (very useful for second-hand buyers – look for the 'run-out models' tab) and a quick glance at the proceeding range suggests that the new models are rather more elegant than what went before.

Most noticeably, all are slim when viewed from the front – the 500 floorstander measures only 145mm across. The required cabinet volume comes via their depth.

Quadral smothers the Rhodium enclosures with an extremely modern and rather fashionable 'silk gloss' finish that is available in either black or white and manages to make them look slightly less... German than some older efforts from the brand.

The narrow cabinets don't seem to have any drastic effect on the frequency response of the Rhodiums, however. Quadral quotes 48Hz as the roll off for the 200 standmount and down to 35Hz from the 500 floorstander. This extension comes with a sting in the tail, though. None of these speakers are terribly sensitive and they have rated impedances of both four ohms (the Base 100 centre and the 200) and eight (the 500). In practice, any reasonably powerful AV receiver or

dedicated power amplifier won't struggle with them, but they certainly don't make for the easiest load.

In terms of their build quality, the news is rather better. The Rhodiums are very well finished and are bedecked with pleasing details, such as the sturdy and entirely bespoke speaker terminals and the extremely hefty chrome-plated spikes used on the plinth of the 500 – these enable level (and sturdy) placement on your cinema room floor (the Rhodiums seem to have been designed by at least one person who knows the strengths and capabilities of a toddler). All the models use a grille held in place by magnetic trim tabs but the magnets that Quadral has used make most rivals look feeble by comparison.

Everything is very well thought-out then, but as an aside, the 500 must rank as one of the hardest speakers I've ever had to unbox

'All have a meaningful bass output... the soundstage is built upon a layer of robust low frequencies'

thanks to the tall end-opening package and very snug fit of the panniers. This means they should survive the trip to you in pristine condition, but could make house moves a pain.

Delivering the .1 channel is Quadral's Qube 10 subwoofer. This is not a *bona fide* member of the Rhodium range and unlike the other speakers has been seen by us before (*HCC* #223). The manufacturer has taken the same decision that a number of companies have recently, which is to group subwoofers into their own range and allow you to pick one as necessary to suit your speakers. It's a handsome device as subwoofers go, but it doesn't have the same silk finish as its system partners, leaving it slightly at odds – but as it is unfussy about positioning you can pop it out of sight if you want.

As its name suggests, the Qube 10 packs a 10in bass driver (down-firing). Motivating this is a 200W Class D amp. Controls include line-level and high-level inputs, crossover and phase.

Like everything else I've ever seen by Quadral, the build is solid and the quality of the lacquered finish is exceptional, with a deep shine and nothing in the way of visible imperfections. The brushed, Quadral-embazoned steel plate on the front is also a nice touch.

Let's get together

Connected to a Yamaha RX-A3040 (see p76), the Quadral's show some house traits from the



start. In keeping with everything else I have listened to from the brand, the speakers integrate extremely well. The soundfield crafted by the front three speakers is nigh-on seamless and the movement of effects front-to-back is equally adept.

With the eerie drama *Nightcrawler* (Blu-ray), the performance of this Rhodium package once Lou Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) has got rid of his battered Toyota and is ripping through the streets of Los Angeles in a Dodge

Challenger is atmospheric and very believable. Effects move swiftly and accurately from one channel to another, and the pared-back score is blended in well, making for a compelling and convincing experience.

There is plenty of fine detail too. The Rhodiums have no trouble locating the incidental effects that lift soundtracks, and they do so without losing the context in which they appear. Where these speaker are a little less happy is when there is a huge

amount of information to get to grips with. In Colin Firth's controversial demolition of the church congregation in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (Blu-ray), the Quadral's never fully manage to convey the high-speed devastation shown on screen. Everything is there, but it never opens out in quite the way that some rivals can manage. Even with plenty of power and reasonable levels, there isn't the immediacy and presence that you might expect with a fairly sizeable set of speakers.

Part of this seems to stem from the top end. Lacking the custom-built ribbon tweeters of the company's more expensive models, the Rhodiums can harden up a little even at relatively normal listening levels, and lack the almost liquid quality that has characterised some other Quadral's. When used at lower volumes the performance is undoubtedly smoother – but this seems to come at the expense of the drive and grunt that impressed me so much with the level up high.

This is a bit of a shame as the midrange of all of the speakers in the pack – but particularly the Rhodium 500 – is simply excellent. There is real weight and texture to the way that these cabinets handle voices and instrumentation, and they do a superb job of creating a sense of depth and immersion as well. The fact that all have meaningful bass response in their own right, courtesy of those sizeable drivers, also aids cinematic impact.

The soundstage is built upon a layer of robust low frequencies.

And what of the Qube 10 subwoofer? Well, this also puts in a fine showing. It is not a woofer that has been designed with a view to vibrating your vision (and individually retails for around £500) but it manages to effortlessly augment the lower registers of the Rhodiums and it does so with detail and subtlety. It may not be part of the range, but it fits in fine.

Of course, one of the advantages of having a speaker as large as the Rhodium 500 is that if you choose to listen in stereo you can get by without the woofer. And in 2.0 this system is eminently listenable – especially as the treble of the 500 seemed smoother and more refined when experienced in isolation.

Carefully does it

These inconsistencies in the performance make our Quadral Rhodium 5.1 set a slightly frustrating package. When it is good, it is very good indeed. The movement of effects, integration between speakers and the scale they generate are all near the top of the class. The excellent build, attention to detail and elegant design are also worth shouting about. However, the performance with very busy movie sequences and the slightly forward treble presentation mean that they fail to deliver a knockout blow. But if you are shopping in this price range, they are definitely worth a careful audition ■

SPECIFICATIONS

RHODIUM 500

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in titanium-coated polypropylene midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter

ENCLOSURE: Front-ported

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 35Hz-38kHz

SENSITIVITY: 87dB

POWER HANDLING: 150W

DIMENSIONS: 145(w) x 890(h) x 282(d)mm

WEIGHT: 14kg

RHODIUM 200

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6in titanium-coated polypropylene midbass driver; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter

ENCLOSURE: Rear-ported

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 48Hz-38kHz

SENSITIVITY: 86dB

POWER HANDLING: 90W

DIMENSIONS: 155(w) x 294(h) x 257(d)mm

WEIGHT: 5.1kg

RHODIUM 100 BASE

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5in titanium-coated polypropylene midbass drivers; 1 x 1in aluminium tweeter

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 60Hz-38kHz

SENSITIVITY: 86dB

POWER HANDLING: 150W

DIMENSIONS: 410(w) x 145(h) x 252(d)mm

WEIGHT: 6.38kg

QUBE 10 (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in downward-firing woofer

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 22-200Hz

ON BOARD POWER: 200W

REMOTE CONTROL: No

DIMENSIONS: 320(w) x 420(h) x 390(d)mm

WEIGHT: 16.5kg

CONNECTIONS: LFE input; speaker level inputs and outputs



HCC VERDICT



Quadral Rhodium 5.1

→ £2,500 approx → www.quadral.com/en

→ Tel: 0203 544 2338 (Nu Nu Distribution)

HIGHS: Expansive and well-integrated sound; great build and handsome looks; slender cabinets

LOWS: Slightly harsh top end; can sound a little congested

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Sony's X85C may be borderline anonymous but it's still one to shortlist, says **Steve May**

The Ultra HD Everyman

THE 55IN KD-55X8505C is the honey trap for Sony's 2015 4K UHD models. Priced considerably below the ultra-slim X90C and the hi-res audio-capable X93C/X94C behemoths, this is UHD for the brand-buying mainstream.

The design is conventionally thin, with a slim bezel and downward-firing speakers. It comes with a wireframe stand, rather than artsy pedestal or feet. The look may be cookie-cutter but build quality seems solid. There's accommodating connectivity, too. You get four HDMI, all of which are HDCP 2.2 compliant, so you can fill your ports with 4K native content as various sources become available. There are also three USBs, plus component AV, Scart, digital audio output and headphone jack. Integrated Wi-Fi is dual-band, allowing you to use the less-congested 5GHz band if your router supports it. Twin DVB-S satellite tuners and two Freeview HD tuners offer plenty of viewing scope.

This is an Android TV, which makes setup a little more convoluted than you might expect – you'll need a Google account for full functionality.

Although it wasn't live for this review, the set also offers YouView. Sony's implementation runs atop the Android OS, and looks indistinguishable from the YouView platform seen on PVRs. While YouView here won't allow for timeshifting to USB drives, you can use the roll-back EPG for a full suite of catch-up TV services – BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4 and Demand 5.

Android's apps include Amazon Prime Instant Video, Netflix and BBC iPlayer – the latter being the only

catch-up service supported natively. There's also Sony Select, which shortcuts you to channels you might have accessed via the old Sony Entertainment Network.

While all Android TVs function much the same, there's a modicum of customisation evident here, headed by the Sony shelf, which sports a Watch TV button, random YouTube clips and other detritus. Below this, the Inputs shelf has to be manually edited to remove irrelevant stuff like Analogue Tuner. Scroll down further and you'll also find an apps shelf, featuring the Google Play store, YouTube, various Google media services (Music, Games, TV) and Photo Sharing Plus, which is a JPEG casting function.

The Google Play TV apps store may be fairly limited, but does include Plex, Musixmatch TV, Vevo and Mubi – it's essentially a mix of pay and free. But Android doesn't have it all its own way. Sony's Discovery bar remains an intuitive and engaging way to navigate TV and radio content.

Out of the box attraction

Picture performance can be spectacular. The screen is well configured out of the box, particularly in regard to its black level performance. Stored on in-set silicon are six 2160p resolution stills which betray astonishing levels of clarity. A desert cityscape >



Use the touchpad for voice control fun



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
55in 4K Android TV

POSITIONING:
Mainstream UHD offering, below the ultra-slim X90C

PEERS:
Panasonic TX-55CX700;
Samsung UE55JU6500

**SING
STARS**

A cappella capers
abound in
Pitch Perfect 2 –
Blu-ray, p97



SONY



A new breed of 4K TV: 55in
for less than £1,500



The Sony employs edge LED lighting

holds detail down to its brickwork, only evident when viewed up close.

Picture presets include Standard, Vivid, Custom, Cinema Pro, Cinema Home, Sports, and Game. While you can dig through the menus to find these, they are also accessible via the Action Menu. Of the two movie presets,

'Core Sony AV values remain strong... this set impresses with black levels and colour fidelity is high'

Cinema Pro and Cinema Home, the latter offers better snap and dynamics. The Pro setting looks dull in comparison.

And if you have a fast 'net connection then you're in luck. The X85C has an integrated HEVC decoder, and consequently the Netflix client is 4K-capable. *Marco Polo* (Netflix Original) is ravishing when it comes to texture and 2160p detail. Unfortunately the same can't be said about Amazon Prime Instant Video – its implementation here taps out at HD.

Helpfully, the X85C also boasts excellent HD upscaling. The Will Smith android romp *I Robot* (Blu-ray), provides a *tour de force* of detail boosting. There's no pixel structure evident in the image beyond the film grain; up-rezzed resolution looks utterly convincing.

The set does black well. For *I Robot*, Smith wears a black leather jacket and trousers, topped off by a black beanie (it's a strong look but he carries it well). Texture and tone on this high fashion ensemble are spot on – the latter is replete with fine detail and tonal gradations,

while the jacket reveals authentic leather creases and folds. Shadow detail and contrast are great. Although edge-lit, screen uniformity is rather fine, too. There's little in the way of light pooling in the edges of the panel.

Motion handling, long a strength for Sony, remains above average. The Standard setting maintains image clarity, but can suffer overt MPEG motion artefacts. Clear is equally crisp, but exacts a brightness penalty. Opt for the True Cinema mode and you'll be artefact free, although the result is a little shy on absolute detail. Arguably, the Custom setting is the best compromise for most material; try putting Smooth on '4' and Clear on '1'.

The colour fidelity on the Triluminos Wide Colour Gamut panel is high. The Live Colour setting allows you to alter the

saturation of colours, amping or curtailing their vividness. The Low setting is best for skin tones, Medium adds a splash more saturation, while High is generally a little too much.

3D may not be fashionable, but the set is Active Shutter 3D compatible, with two pairs of spex supplied. The credit sequence to *I Robot* is set underwater. It's unclear what's happening at first. Text depicting the three laws of robotics dissipates into oxygen bubbles. The sense of depth is pronounced, the airy spheres looking clean and free of crosstalk. It quickly becomes clear that we are looking at a submerged car – a passenger trapped inside. The window shatters and a robot rescuer reaches inside, toward us. The dimensionalisation is excellent.

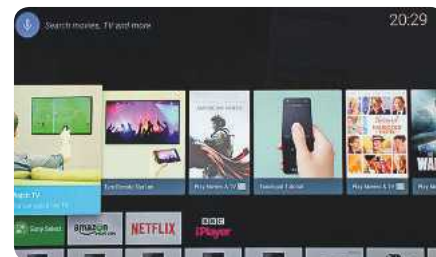
The set's audio is reasonable without being revelatory. Perhaps understandably the presentation is a little monophonic. You'll be looking to argument this with an external sound system sooner rather than later.

Looking beyond Android

Sony has long been an admirer of Google's bigger screen endeavours – it was a backer of the ill-fated Google TV. Admittedly, Android TV is a better proposition, but it flies in the face of streamlined functionality. There's little elegant about the platform. It's also prone (at least for now) to slow firmware updates.

That said, picture quality on the X85C is superior to that of the much more expensive, ultra-thin X90C. Its images are punchier, boosted by a superior black level performance. So core Sony AV values remain strong, but with strong competition, particularly from Panasonic's CX700 Firefox OS model, this affordable 4K Sony isn't quite the slam dunk you might first expect ■

ON THE MENU



→ The Android homescreen is graphically enticing, but the shelf-based system isn't the slickest to operate

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active Shutter

4K: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160

TUNER: Yes. 2 x Freeview HD; 2 x DVB-S satellite

CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; component video; composite video; Scart; Ethernet; 3 x USB; optical digital audio output; headphone output

SOUND: 2 x 10W

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A

CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): N/A

DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,236(w) x 722(h) x 60(d)mm

WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 19.9kg

FEATURES: Built-in dual band Wi-Fi; Wi-Fi Direct; USB and network multimedia playback; 4K Reality Creation Pro with X1 processor; Discovery bar; integrated YouView via firmware update; Android 5.0 TV OS; Triluminos panel

HCC VERDICT



Sony KD-55X8505C

→ £1,300 approx → www.sony.co.uk

→ Tel: 0845 6000 124

HIGHS: Outstanding 4K clarity; great HD upscaling; integrated YouView platform with rollback catch-up TV on the way

LOWS: Average audio; Android Smart TV platform is a chore; no HDR support

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

THE NEW COMPACT HDR-1100S HUMAX SMART SATELLITE HD TV RECORDER

BIG FEATURES IN A SMALL PACKAGE



* Freetime smart TV guide from Freesat shown.

The new compact HDR-1100S Humax Freetime box with built in Wi-Fi is simple to use and packed with great features, and best of all it's subscription free. Viewers can access over 200 channels including 11 in HD, catch up on programmes they've missed through On Demand and the Roll Back TV Guide, and Pause, Rewind and Record live TV. Plus, the Freesat App lets customers plan their viewing and record programmes when they're not at home.

The HDR-1100S Humax Freetime box is available in black or white with 500GB or 1TB of storage.

Visit humaxdigital.co.uk to find out more today.



◀freetime▶

HUMAX
www.humaxdigital.co.uk



The new champion of 4K sport

BT has scored an early goal in the Ultra HD content race with the launch of Europe's first 4K channel. [Adrian Justins](#) puts BT Ultra HD Sport and Humax's new hardware to the test

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
1TB YouView PVR
with 4K capability

POSITION:
The current BT/
YouView flagship

PEERS:
Sky+HD;
Virgin Media TiVo

TEN YEARS AGO I wandered into the Tokyo equivalent of Currys and saw an HD broadcast for the first time. The clarity blew my mind and I've never forgotten the moment. Since then nothing that's been broadcast has had the same impact. That all changed when the Humax DTR-T4000 turned up, the UK's first set-top box to cater for 4K TV owners, as part of the BT TV ecosystem.

There's a lot more to the DTR-T4000 than just UHD, being a fully-fledged YouView PVR with seven-day rollback EPG, an array of on-demand content (some of it free, some rentable, some for purchase) and access to BT TV's subscription package.

Humax has taken the uninspired-looking DTR-T1000 (reviewed in *HCC* # 249) and shoehorned in a UHD tuner and slightly larger hard disk (1TB). Connectivity includes the all-important HDMI 2.0 socket, compatible with HDCP 2.2 and capable of outputting 2160/50p images with 10-bit colour and PCM stereo or Dolby Digital+ surround sound.

Not so long ago the BT TV onscreen interface was more complex than Spaghetti Junction. Things have improved greatly and the remote control (lengthy but light) works nicely in tandem with the operating system, which is quite enjoyable to use, moving slickly along its two-tier carousel of options that appears at the bottom of the screen.

When a Terabyte might not be enough...

The 1TB capacity of the internal hard disk is perhaps a bit mean as you can only record 60 hours of UHD material, but it is sufficient for around 250 hours in HD, 600 hours in standard-def, or somewhere in between for a mix of the three. Recording two live UHD football matches (five hours and eight minutes in total) filled nine per cent of the hard disk, according to the onscreen info. For watch-n-wipers all this won't be an issue, but those who like to hoard TV series and are planning to gorge on as much 4K fare as possible, it could be.



The BT TV product family – three STBs, one router

To access the UHD channels you must be a BT broadband customer (of the Infinity variety – a fast connection is essential) and a BT TV Entertainment Plus subscriber (£15/month). You get 248 channels including 47 premium ones with a decent roster of aerial-delivered non-4K Freeview channels and broadband-delivered BT TV ones. BT says the service will only work if the Humax box is connected by Ethernet (or Powerline, maybe) to a BT Home Hub router (£6.95 for new customers).

Netflix is absent but is coming at an unspecified later date and you can subscribe to Sky Movies, Sky Sports 1 and Sky Sports 2,

'The quality of the UHD Sport channel is truly spectacular – it's football with a real sense of drama'

although these are not in HD, let alone UHD, and look diabolical on a 55in screen.

Included in the subscription is the BT Sport Pack (BT Sport 1, BT Sport 2, BT Sport Europe, BT Sport ESPN), which includes all of the UEFA Champions League and a number of Premier League games. Approximately 50 channels are in HD but that includes seven BT Sport red button options.

One or two live matches a week will be shown in 4K on the Ultra HD Sport channel (number 434 on the EPG). Other sports lined up include MotoGP, UFC and rugby. To help satiate your desire for 2,160p material, there's a handful of short promos in 4K designed to show off the format, located in the BT TV portal.

The EPG is a paragon of onscreen guides, so that finding and recording shows is about as easy as it gets. The PVR is highly responsive apart from taking its time to boot up (a real annoyance) and re-tune channels. Pausing is instantaneous but fast-forward and rewind aren't the expected progressions that simply

double the speed smoothly with each press. Instead, they stutter and jump like a kangaroo doing a steeplechase.

Soccer spectacular

When viewed live or in replay the quality of the UHD pictures (in this case on a Samsung UE55JU7500) is truly spectacular, with those additional pixels paying rich dividends in terms of definition and clarity. And, from my early viewings, it's clear the event director is choosing shots that take advantage of this, with hunting out wider angles that allow you to see more of the pitch and stadium.

A major benefit is how well defined nearly everything is. Large amorphous areas such as the turf still look like a solid carpet rather than lawn grass, especially when the camera pans. The frame rate of 50fps combined well with my screen's motion processing to keep everything supremely smooth, although the shape of the ball did slightly distort sometimes. Note that you could partner this PVR with a Full HD TV (the HDMI output can be set to 720p and 1080p) and still enjoy those 50fps broadcasts.

During Chelsea vs Arsenal in the Community Shield, one shot showed Jose Mourinho standing on the touchline. The faces of around 800 supporters were clearly visible behind him. When Eden Hazard took a free kick just outside the Arsenal box, the camera zoomed in slightly so that every player appeared pin-sharp against the turf. It was football with a real sense of drama.

Colour fidelity and contrast of the 4K content were first-rate. Looking at the same game on the non-4K BT Sport HD channel, it was as if someone had smeared vaseline on the screen.

With no compatible studio cameras, the half-time bit is done by the commentator up in the stands, which gives the game away that BT has yet to put resources in to the overall presentation. But when the actual live footage is so impressive, that hardly seems important. The bottom line is that UHD is here, and not before time. Those already signed up for BT broadband are advised to book an engineer in for an install as soon as possible ■

The HDMI 2.0 output supports 3,840 x 2,160 video



ON THE MENU



→ BT's tie-in with the YouView platform means the service offers a swift, logical EPG (with 'rollback' option). And the HD Channel tab now includes UHD fare

SPECIFICATIONS

HDD: Yes. 1TB
CATCH-UP CHANNELS: Yes. (BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, All4, Demand 5, BT Player, S4C)
CONNECTIONS: 1 x HDMI; 1 x optical audio; 1 x Ethernet; RF aerial loopthrough; 1 x USB (charge port)
DIMENSIONS: 234(w) x 40(h) x 149(d)mm
WEIGHT: 1.1kg
FEATURES: 14-day (seven-day rollback) YouView EPG; Series Link; live pause, rewind, fast-forward; PCM stereo or Dolby Digital+ sound output; HDMI UHD 8-bit/10-bit colour output; 2160p/1080p/1080i/720p output; on-demand content (Sky Store, Curzon Cinema, Nat Geo Wild, E!, Syfy, Universal, Animal Planet, Investigation Discovery, Sony TV, Discovery, TLC, History, Fox, Comedy Central, MTV, Now TV, Milkshake!, UKTV Play, Quest); parental controls; audio description; subtitles

HCC VERDICT



BT TV UHD box (Humax DTR-T4000)

→ Installation plus £15/month sub
 → www.bt.com/ultraHD
 → Tel: 0800 800 150

HIGHS: Pin-sharp UHD image clarity and detail; slick menu system; YouView seven-day rollback EPG; plenty of catch-up content

LOWS: Lack of UHD content; requires BT broadband; box slow to boot up; no Netflix yet

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



AV heavyweight from the old school

Cambridge Audio's new high-grade seven-channel receiver opts to bypass next-gen sound formats in favour of premium construction and sound quality. **Danny Phillips** reports

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
7.2-channel
AV receiver

POSITION:
The more affordable
of two new
Cambridge
Audio models

PEERS:
Yamaha RX-A2040;
Denon AVR-X4100W;
Onkyo TX-NR838

DOLBY ATMOS AND the imminent DTS:X are shaking up the AV receiver market with their object-based antics, yet Cambridge Audio is having none of it. With its latest pair of audiophile receivers, the CXR120 and CXR200 – its first new models since 2013's Azur 751R – the company has given these features the cold shoulder, opting instead to make pure sound quality the priority.

Trading on performance alone is a bold move in such a fiercely-contested marketplace, particularly with models from the larger brands offering a superior spec for a similar price. Can Cambridge Audio make it work?

High-grade innards

The 7.2-channel CXR120 may be the cheaper and least muscular (120W per channel rather than 200W) of the two receivers, but with a £1,500 tag we're in high-end territory. Most of that money goes towards a formidable array

of high-grade components, including a fully-discrete class A/B amplifier design, an oversize low-flux toroidal transformer and Cirrus Logic 3-core 32-bit DSP chip.

This is all encased within elegant black bodywork that appears to float above the surface thanks to recessed feet – a design trick used across the CX range of separates. Construction is immaculate – the CXR120 sports a brushed faceplate bolted to an acoustically-damped metal chassis and immovable aluminium top cover.

Cambridge Audio has stripped back the cluttered fascia of the 751R for a cleaner, simpler look, leaving only a handful of buttons, four ports (USB, HDMI, headphone and 3.5mm) and a smooth, firm volume dial. Succinct level and input messages on the tinted status window are easy to see.

Connectivity is fine without going overboard. There are six HDMI 2.0 inputs on the back with support for HDCP 2.2, 4K and

3D, while the front port is MHL-compatible. Dual HDMI outputs drive two displays at once, but separate Zone 2 output is held back for the CXR200. They're joined by dual subwoofer outputs and two USB ports for an optional Bluetooth module and supplied Wi-Fi antenna, although the latter has to be tilted to avoid the HDMI cable above.

Despite the lack of Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and AirPlay, the feature list still includes 4K upscaling, DSD playback via HDMI, Spotify Connect and network audio streaming. The latter is handled by the same StreamMagic module found in Cambridge's CXN network

'The CXR120 tears into the turbo-charged opening of *Star Trek Into Darkness* with agility and enthusiasm'

player. Format support from uPnP devices includes hi-res FLAC, ALAC, AIFF and WAV up to 192kHz/24-bit. I wouldn't expect anything less from a brand with a hi-fi heritage.

Disappointingly, streaming is only available through the Cambridge Connect Android/iOS app – you can't do it onscreen using the physical remote. The latter is easy to navigate and the app is also pleasant to use, allowing you to control Spotify playback, switch sources and adjust volume. However, limited access to the CXR's audio functionality means you can't ditch the physical handset completely.

Speaker configuration can be carried out manually, but auto setup mode proves quick and accurate. It sets the levels and distances, but leaves tonal characteristics alone. And height channels aren't totally ignored – the AVR features Dolby Pro-Logic IIz processing.

I hooked up the CXR120 to a Monitor Audio Bronze 5.1 package and they formed a distinguished all-British combo. The sound is refined yet entertaining, and the CXR120 maintains a stiff upper lip no matter how

much you provoke it. In fact, it actually thrives on being pushed. At middling volumes it can sound a little polite and clinical, uninvolved even, but gets more assured as the dial creeps clockwise.

Crank it up and the CXR120 tears into the turbo-charged opening of *Star Trek Into Darkness* (Blu-ray, TrueHD) with agility and enthusiasm. As Kirk and Bones dart through the undergrowth on Nibiru, the receiver's considerable drive and punch keeps excitement levels high. Vigorous orchestral stabs propel the action forward, while weighty bass adds depth and scale. Kirk stuns an alien beast and you can feel the tight, solid thud as it topples to the ground. But most impressive is how real this all seems thanks to the CXR's natural, insightful presentation.

When we move inside the volcano, the CXR120 starts to flex its muscles. Thick waves of LF thunder into the room as the lava rises and the mid-range roars. Dialogue also shines. Benedict Cumberbatch's voice sounds utterly delicious as he reveals his machinations to Kirk – it's deep and dripping in detail, with the CXR laying bare his rich and plummy inflections.

Swapping spaceships for simians, the CXR120 shows its softer side with *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*. As Caesar stalks a herd of deer in the movie's opening scene, the CXR120 performs a breathtaking display of detail clarity, with hissing rain, creaking branches and breathing apes bristling from every speaker. When the chase gets underway, footsteps on the mossy floor sound solid and textured.

And the CXR120 is a very musical performer. An 88kHz/24-bit version of Daft Punk's *Give Life Back To Music* sparkles with detail in the hi-hats and guitar licks, while the metronomic drum kicks and bass exhibit supreme timing.

An issue of trust

Cambridge Audio is asking you to trust in the CXR120's performance when you hand over your credit card. It rewards that trust with muscular, agile and beautifully detailed sound, not to mention stunning build quality. Brand loyalists with no interest in next-gen speaker layouts will lap this up. Others may remain unconvinced. They should grab a listen ■

ON THE MENU



→ The UI employs black and white and a few shades in between. Not glam then, but buyers will appreciate how quick and easy it is to get to grips with the CXR120's functions. You'll need the smartphone/tablet app for streaming control, though

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: No. Dolby TrueHD, Pro-Logic IIz, Plus, EX

DTS:X: No. DTS-HD MA, DTS-HD HR, Neo:6, ES

THX: No

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: Yes

MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 7 x 120W

MULTIROOM: No

AV INPUTS: Yes. 4 x digital audio (2 x optical and 2 x coaxial); 3 x analogue stereo

HDMI: Yes. 7 x inputs; 2 x outputs (all v2.0 on the back panel – front input is v1.4 for MHL)

VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K

COMPONENT VIDEO: No

DIMENSIONS: 430(w) x 165(h) x 420(d)mm

WEIGHT: 13.2kg

ALSO FEATURING: HDCP 2.2 support; Wi-Fi with supplied antenna; StreamMagic uPnP streaming; Spotify Connect and internet radio; 3D & 4K passthrough; Cambridge Connect app; DSD playback via HDMI; asynchronous USB audio input; optical Bluetooth module; MP3, WMA, AAC, WAV, FLAC, ALAC, AIFF, HE AAC, AAC+, OGG Vorbis file support; front height speaker support from Pro-Logic IIz; twin display output; Cirrus Logic DSP; iOS/Android app

HCC VERDICT

Cambridge Audio CXR120

→ £1,500 approx → www.cambridgeaudio.com

→ Tel: 0333 900 0093 (Richer Sounds)

HIGHS: Keeps composure at high volumes; lots of detail; big, weighty soundstage; musical two-channel performance; gorgeous design and solid build

LOWS: Lacks Dolby Atmos and DTS:X; can't access network features onscreen; polite at lower volumes; app offers limited audio controls; Bluetooth is optional extra

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

The CXR120 has a neatly arranged back panel



Silent NAS HS-251

Silent & Fanless NAS

with HDMI output for the best audiovisual experience

Celeron® dual-core 2.41GHz CPU, burst up to 2.58GHz



- Support 2.5"/ 3.5" NAS HDD or SSD
- Up to 7.1 channel audio passthrough and high-quality multimedia playback via HDMI
- On-the-fly and offline Full HD hardware accelerated video transcoding
- Centralise file storage, backup & sharing
- Watch high quality videos on Smart TV
- Watch videos on multiple devices concurrently
- Personal cloud for creating a multimedia library with DLNA, AirPlay and Plex support



2.41GHz
Dual Core
CPU

2GB
DDR3L
RAM



QNAP SYSTEMS, INC.

Copyright © 2015 QNAP Systems, Inc. All rights reserved.

www.qnap.com

amazon.co.uk

ebuyer.com

dabs.com

SCAN

broadbandbuyer.co.uk

Affordable Blu-ray players

The hi-def deck market has a lot to offer even if your budget is pegged at just £100. **Danny Phillips** auditions four models that caught his bargain-hunting eye



LG BP550

Compatible with LG's MusicFlow multiroom system

PANASONIC DMP-BDT370

4K upscaling is on the feature list here

SAMSUNG BD-J5900

A curved disc-spinner to go with your curved TV!

SONY BDP-S5500

One of the most compact players around

LG BP550

Spotify, wireless headphone hookup and a quirky finish help this player stand out



MULTIROOM IS THIS year's audio buzzword, with all the big brands (and some small ones) unveiling their own music-streaming ecosystems for round-the-house partying. Some, like LG and Samsung, have warmly welcomed their Blu-ray decks into the multiroom fold, allowing you to stream CDs to other speakers on the network – useful if you haven't bothered to rip them yet.

It's a nice surprise, then, to find multiroom functionality on the LG BP550, which works in tandem with the Korean corp's Music Flow speaker systems. I paired the player up with its HS7 audio bar and used the swanky Remote App to stream some CDs to the speaker – the experience proved slick and glitch-free.

Smallscale spinner

The BP550's design is in one way understated, with a neutral black finish and simple lines. Like the Sony BDP-S5500 elsewhere in this group test, it's a deck of Ant-Man proportions, using Hank Pym's suit to squeeze itself down to a svelte 43mm high. That's terrific if space is tight, but it appears a bit incongruous sat next to a massive AV receiver.

And look closely and you'll see a pattern of 3D cubes covering the entire body – an unusual but distinctive touch. Build quality is typically lightweight and plasticky but more than acceptable for the money. You can snaffle this spinner for around £100.

Front-panel clutter is kept to the absolute minimum, with just two buttons (open/close, standby) and a USB port. The lack of a display panel leaves the onscreen menus as your only visual guide – there's a tiny LED that glows in different colours but it's not very helpful.

Rear socketry has a distinctly budget whiff – all you get are HDMI and coaxial digital outputs, plus an Ethernet port that can be used instead of the built-in Wi-Fi. I wouldn't

have expected much more for the money, but personally I'd find an optical audio output more useful.

In terms of features the BP550 offers a healthy selection of 'Premium' online apps with all the usual suspects – BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Amazon Instant Video, Blinkbox, YouTube, BBC News and Sport. Yet the highlights are Now TV and Spotify, which you won't find on any of LG's rivals. If you're a subscriber to either of these services, the ability to stream them to your home cinema system might be too good an opportunity to pass up.

There's no ITV Player or 4OD clients though, and LG has also jettisoned the LG Apps section, which contained loads of games, puzzles and second-tier apps. This probably isn't a major loss.

Let's start streaming

The deck supports DLNA streaming and does it remarkably well. It plays a wide range of formats including MKV and FLAC, plus the graphics-heavy onscreen menus are easy to follow and even large HD video files start playing without any delay.

Those menus are identical to last year's LG players. The use of bright, colourful icons and wacky backdrops (the Apps menu is set in a theme park, apparently) makes menu navigation enjoyable, and the deck's software is smooth and speedy even when running complex apps like Spotify. The physical remote poses no problems, but the aforementioned Remote App provides a slicker and more entertaining way of driving the deck.

The LG BP550 spins 3D platters and upscales DVDs to 1080p. There's also a Private Sound Mode that streams audio to your smartphone so you can watch your disc collection through headphones when everyone's gone to bed – good if you have

movies to view that are too embarrassing for anyone else to know about.

There's no screen mirroring or 4K upscaling offered – Panasonic's player (the DMP-BDT370) is the only one on test to serve up the latter.

I can't grumble about the LG's disc loading speeds. *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* spins in 30 seconds and *Godzilla* took a mere 15 seconds to stomp onto screen.

You can tweak the LG's pictures using basic adjustments in the Option menu, but I wouldn't recommend it – out of the box the BP550's hi-def images are dazzling in both 2D and 3D. *Guardians of the Galaxy* played with searing clarity, inky blacks and comic-book colours that pinged from the screen.

It makes a good fist at upscaling DVDs too, although the sight of some twitchy pixels and jagged edges are reminders that you're not dealing with a high-end machine.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 1080p
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 1 x output
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: No
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. 1 x coaxial
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: Yes
SACD/DVD-A: No/No
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 270(w) x 43(h) x 195(d)mm
WEIGHT: 0.87kg
FEATURES: Compatible with LG Music Flow systems; USB port; Standard, Vivid, Movie presets and User mode; Private Sound Mode 2.0; 'Premium' internet apps including Netflix, Amazon Instant Video, Now TV and Spotify; SmartShare DLNA media streaming; MKV, AVCHD, DivX, AVI, MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC, JPEG playback

Panasonic DMP-BDT370

This mature-looking player majors on media playback and 4K scaling



4K UPSCALING ON Blu-ray players is a tricky issue. If you own a 4K TV with its own built-in upscaling, then there's little point having it on your Blu-ray player – unless, of course, the deck's upscaling engine is superior to that of the TV. This certainly isn't guaranteed from a £100 player.

Whatever your feelings on the issue, the DMP-BDT370 offers it, so this could be a no-brainer if you prefer to upscale at source. The player also allows you to playback hi-res photos in 4K resolution on your TV.

Panasonic's deck also bucks the trend for compact design with a chassis that measures 430mm wide, making it a better match for an AV receiver than the LG or Sony rivals.

Anyone familiar with last year's DMP-BDT360 will know what to expect aesthetically – all-black bodywork (also available in silver) with elegant, curved corners and a fascia hidden behind a drop-down flap. It's jazzed up by a silver strip and a 4K Ultra HD Upscaling logo screaming 'look at me' from the front.

Once again I had to alert the build quality police over the flimsy plastic flap and feather-light bodywork, but the DMP-BDT370 escapes with nothing more than a caution on the grounds that it's par for the course at this price.

Reading material

This is the only player here to sport a front-panel display, imparting its operational wisdom in large, bright digits, while the pair of USB ports next door let you play media from storage sticks. Because it's all hidden behind the flap, everything looks clean and minimal. Panasonic sometimes includes an SD card slot on its players. Not here, though.

On the back you'll find the usual budget trio – HDMI, optical digital audio and Ethernet.

The built-in Wi-Fi facilitates Miracast screen mirroring, DLNA file streaming and access

to a decent range of internet apps. The main services are here – BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Amazon Instant Video, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter – but there's nothing that sets it apart from the crowd like ITV Player, 4OD, Now TV or Spotify.

It doesn't help that the apps are presented in the same cumbersome menu Panasonic has been using for yonks. The apps are spread across several menu pages and the cursor is slow to respond, making the whole online experience feel laboured. And don't even get me started on the built-in web browser.

Regarding DLNA support, the Panasonic played everything I could throw at it except (oddly) DivX. Hi-res FLAC, ALAC and DSD files could be enjoyed via USB.

Panasonic has decided against a revamp of its menu system and wisely so – the home screen is still among the most intuitive I've encountered. The option tiles are arranged in a cross, and one press of the relevant key on the direction pad takes you to the next screen. Presentation becomes more basic once you start diving into DLNA menus, but it's always

'There's no need to play with image tweaks – the Normal preset offers the most neutral balance'

logical and responsive. The remote has chunky rubber keys and helpful colour coding, but the clumsily-placed Netflix button caused far too many accidental visits to the streaming service for my liking.

The DMP-BDT370 loads discs as quickly as the LG, taking 16 seconds to play *Godzilla* and 30 to fire up *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. Once

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 1 x output
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: No
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. 1 x optical
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: Yes
SACD/DVD-A: No/No
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 415(w) x 43(h) x 182(d)mm
WEIGHT: 1.2kg
FEATURES: Miracast; twin USB ports; Normal, Soft, Fine presets and User mode; internet apps including Netflix, BBC iPlayer and Amazon Instant Video; DLNA media streaming; MKV, XviD, AVCHD, MP4, JPEG, MP3, FLAC, AAC, WMA, WAV, DSD playback; selectable wallpaper for home screen; 4K JPEG playback

loaded, the deck turns in a textbook display of hi-def image reproduction, presenting the vibrant, fast-moving superhero shenanigans without putting a pixel out of place. 3D discs look equally stunning.

Colours are bold and nuanced, while the well-judged contrast level keeps the image punchy and detailed even during dark scenes. There's no need to play about with the image adjustments either, as the Normal preset offers the most neutral balance.

I checked out the deck's 4K upscaling on a Samsung UE55HU7500 and although it was subjectively difficult to see any real difference, rest assured that it didn't look any worse. The feature could prove more useful with a budget 4K set, of course.

This is one of the more accomplished DVD upscalers of the four. Images are presented with superb solidity and stability, doing a top job of suppressing the jumpy block noise and jaggies in the notoriously scruffy *Se7en* platter. ➤

Samsung BD-J5900

More curves from the Korean giant – but this player should catch up with catch-up TV



HAILING FROM THE lower reaches of Samsung's range, the BD-J5900 is the most affordable player here, but it's not the vanilla affair you might expect – the busy spec sheet includes 3D playback, Wi-Fi, screen mirroring, internet apps and DLNA streaming. It seems that £90 goes a long way these days.

Its design is also the most distinctive of the bunch. The curved bodywork is chosen to match Samsung's curved TVs and soundbars, but even if you don't own any bendy gear it's still an appealing look. Like the LG and Sony it's slim and compact, measuring 290mm wide by 39mm high. I slipped it into my AV stand and it virtually disappeared into the shadows.

Up close the deck's plastic casing is finished in rows of textured ridges with glossy side panels, and the front panel is stripped to the bare minimum – just two buttons, a disc tray and a USB port behind a flap. Build quality is commensurate with the price, with the BD-J5900 a little hollow-sounding when tapped. But if you want heavyweight construction, you're looking in the wrong place.

Socketry mirrors that of the Sony and LG, with HDMI, coaxial digital and Ethernet ports – the latter provides a wired alternative to the dual-band Wi-Fi connection.

Uncluttered home screen

The deck boots up in a few seconds and greets you with an eye-catching, uncluttered home screen, a pared-down version of the previously reviewed BD-J7500's interface (*HCC #247*). The large tiles and stylised graphics form a natty combo and the cursor moves speedily round the screen. Sony's slicker interface has the edge, though.

The UI is arranged into several sections – Play Disc, Photos, Videos, Music – with a row of apps along the bottom. Everything is within easy reach. An icon on the home page lets you

switch devices or servers, which can then be explored using the Photos, Videos and Music options. The Play Disc panel displays a still image from the loaded Blu-ray, which is a nice touch.

The weighty remote is a pleasure to use thanks to its neat rows of clearly-labelled rubber keys, but their black colouring makes them difficult to see in the dark.

Disappointingly, the BD-J5900 lacks the extensive range of internet content of Samsung's top-end players. Based on the Opera TV Store, the lineup currently comprises just eight apps – Amazon Instant Video, Netflix, YouTube, Dailymotion, AccuWeather, CinemaNow, Yupp TV and Hotlist. There's no ITV Player, 4OD, Demand 5 or even BBC iPlayer (the latter is usually so common I'd begun to think of it as part of the Blu-ray specification...). This certainly loses the Samsung some Brownie points against its more generous rivals, particularly if the player is to be partnered with a legacy HD TV. Samsung promises iPlayer is 'coming soon', though.

Delve into the Opera TV Store menu from the homepage and you'll find a library of other apps, none of which are particularly compelling – unless Sportfishing with Dan Hernandez floats your boat.

Media maestro

The DLNA streaming feature works well. I had no trouble accessing supported files stored on my laptop (DivX, AVI, MP3, AAC) and the menu structure is easy to follow, but don't expect hi-res FLAC or MKV streaming. These can only be played via the USB port.

Although the feature list is surprisingly good for the money, two things you don't get are 4K scaling and multiroom CD/USB streaming, talents reserved for the BD-J7500.

The deck loads Blu-ray discs in a flash. Stubborn platters like *Terminator Salvation*

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 1080p
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 1 x output
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: No
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. 1 x optical
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: Yes, dual-band
SACD/DVD-A: No/No
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 290(w) x 39 (h) x 221(d)mm
WEIGHT: 1kg
FEATURES: Screen mirroring; USB port; Normal, Movie, Dynamic presets and User mode; Opera TV Store internet apps including Netflix and Amazon Instant Video; DLNA file streaming; DivX, WMV, MKV, AVI, MP3, WMA, AAC, WAV, FLAC playback

and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* load in 25 and 30 seconds respectively, but most others take around 20.

In terms of picture quality the BD-J5900 doesn't put a foot wrong. When hordes of elves, dwarves and orcs flood the screen during *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, the Samsung keeps on top of the action. Intricate CG characters are meticulously rendered; edges are hard and clean. Vibrant colours and excellent contrast levels make the picture punchy, while smooth tracking and a lack of judder helps marshal the chaos when the battle starts in anger.

Minor mosquito noise and a few jaggies on diagonal lines make a cameo when watching upscaled DVDs but it didn't ruin my enjoyment. Rich colours and clear detail more than make up for it.

You can adjust the contrast, brightness, colour and sharpness, or select one of the presets. As with the Panasonic, I found the Normal setting provides the best balance.

Sony BDP-S5500

This dinky deck packs a new-look design, refreshed UI and a penchant for speed



BUDGET BLU-RAY PLAYERS are shrinking quicker than Christian Bale in *The Machinist* and the BDP-S5500 is a case in point. Measuring just 230mm wide, this compact and *bijou* box will sit just as comfortably on a bedroom desk as a TV stand.

The mature Blu-ray player market isn't exactly a hotbed of innovation, so it's good to see Sony ringing some changes with new external and onscreen designs.

Firstly, it's ditched the pointy 'Sense of Quartz' design of last year's decks for a simpler black box approach, with panels on the fascia decorated in different textures (brushed, glossy and dappled). The look is inspired by 'pure geometric shapes' – squares, in other words.

Indeed, the S5500 is nice to look at. The bodywork is light and the front buttons have a slightly flimsy fit, but the aluminium top cover is firmly bolted to the chassis. There isn't much to play with on the front panel except standby and open/close buttons, plus a USB port for media playback. The status LED used in place of a display panel is so small it might as well not be there.

The back panel again offers just three sockets – HDMI out, coaxial digital out and an Ethernet port. Only those with complex systems will need anything more.

A fond farewell...

Fire up the player and you'll discover the BDP-S5500's other big design change. Tissues at the ready – it's time to bid a fond farewell to Sony's superb Xross Media Bar (XMB), which makes way for a new home screen that's simpler and easier on the eye.

It places a grid of tiles over a punchy blue backdrop, each one containing an app or function. It's split into Featured Apps and My Apps, the latter allowing you to pin your favourite content to the home screen. Other icons let you explore DLNA servers and visit the

thorough setup menu, the fonts and icons of which have echoes of the old XMB.

In terms of features, the deck picks up where last year's BDP-S5200 left off, offering a healthy range of web content, DLNA streaming and 3D support. 4K is conspicuous by its absence – that's found on the step-up

'The BDP-S5500 is a real speed demon – thanks to a Quick Start mode it boots up in about a second'

BDP-S6500 – but screen mirroring is a welcome feature at this price. I'm surprised not to find any CD streaming functionality though, given that Sony has launched its own range of multiroom audio gear.

Network performance gets a shot in the arm from Advanced Super Wi-Fi, which aims to give a stronger and more stable connection than bog-standard wireless. And certainly, once locked on the player went about its network business without any problems – DLNA video and web streams loaded quickly and there were no drop-outs at all.

Sony has never skimped on internet apps and once again the selection is decent enough. BBC iPlayer and Demand 5 headline the catch-up TV quotient, while Netflix and Amazon Instant Video satisfy movie streaming needs. YouTube and Facebook are the obligatory time-killers, plus there's tons of other stuff further down the pecking order if you're bored. The lack of ITV Player and 4OD still stick in the craw, though.

Format support via DLNA is pleasing – ALAC and DivX were the only formats that wouldn't play. Smartphone users can browse

servers using Sony's nifty Side View app, which also lets you control the player and view an EPG for your chosen TV provider.

The BDP-S5500 is a real speed demon. Thanks to a Quick Start mode it boots up in about a second and skips from menu to menu instantly. Disc loading is also fast – most Blu-ray platters fire up after 15 seconds but *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* and *Terminator Salvation* took 30 seconds, which is still an acceptable wait.

The Sony passes pixels to a TV as well as the other three players here, whether in two or three dimensions. Pristine detail, vibrant colours and deep blacks make movies look crisp and dynamic, with smooth motion. There are two picture presets for differing light conditions (Brighter Room and Theatre Room) plus Block and Mosquito noise reduction if the standard settings don't quite hit the spot. 1080p upscaling is solid.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 1080p
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 1 x output
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: No
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. 1 x coaxial
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: Yes
SACD/DVD-A: No/No
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 230(w) x 39(h) x 194(d)mm
WEIGHT: 0.8kg
FEATURES: Advanced Super Wi-Fi; Quick Start; screen mirroring; USB port; Brighter and Theatre Room presets; Block and Noise Reduction; Sony Entertainment Network; TV SideView app; DLNA media streaming; MKV, AVI, XviD, WMV, AVCHD, MP3, WMA, FLAC, WAV and JPEG playback

Final standings

AFTER GIVING THESE four decks the once-over, one thing is abundantly clear – you can get a lot for your money at the budget end of the market. Features that were once reserved for top-end players, like 4K upscaling, 3D, screen mirroring and DLNA have filtered down to the entry-level arena. Of course, there are sacrifices to be made in terms of build quality and connections, and full-size players seem to be going the way of the dodo, but on the whole things are rosy in the budget Blu-ray garden (well, apart from the threat of a new 4K format...).

Even the cheapest player in our test, the £90 Samsung BD-J5900, boasts a glowing spec sheet, although it's not quite good enough to prevent it finishing in last place.

The strength of Samsung's higher-end players is their comprehensive range of catch-up TV apps, including ITV Player and 4OD, but with none of these onboard, the BD-J5900 is stripped of its power like a freshly-shorn Samson. You don't even get BBC iPlayer at present.

However, the inclusion of dual-band Wi-Fi and screen mirroring is very welcome for the money. It's good-looking too, with a design influenced by Samsung's curved TVs and soundbars, while user-friendly menus and eye-popping pictures are further positives.

Sharing the second place spotlight are the Sony and LG players, which are closely

matched in almost every respect. They offer compact, easy-on-the-eye designs and a healthy set of features. The Sony offsets its lack of multiroom functionality with screen mirroring; for LG it's the other way round.

Even their internet lineup is a close run thing – Sony offers more apps, but LG brings you Now TV and Spotify. Both operating systems are slick and attractive.

Just edging into first place is the Panasonic DMP-BDT370, which offers the best overall balance of features, performance, usability and design for the money. It's the only player of the four to offer 4K upscaling, and backs it up with a decent range of internet content, DLNA streaming, dual USB ports and the most impressive upscaled DVD pictures of the lot. The clunky apps menu is desperate for a revamp, however ■

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL



Spend more, get more: These four players represent the affordable end of the market. But what's on offer to those with more money to spend?

Samsung BD-J7500: Available for around £150, this step-up model features twin HDMI outputs and multichannel phono audio, making it a great choice for those with older AV receivers. And unlike the BD-J5900 on test here, it carries the full suite of catch-up apps.

Sony BDP-S7200: Launched last year, this remains Sony's flagship, and is an absolute cracker. Standout features include its hi-res audio support (including SACD playback) and 4K upscaling, which is worth investigating. Bag one for around £180.

Panasonic DMP-BDT700: Now available for approximately £420, Panasonic's range-topper dates from 2014 but impresses with its build quality, feature set and high-end ethos. 4K upscaling and 4K JPEG playback will appeal to Ultra HD TV owners.



HCC VERDICT



LG BP550

→ £100 approx → www.lg.com/uk
→ Tel: 0344 847 5454

HIGHS: Slick, cooperative DLNA streaming; Now TV and Spotify internet apps; eye-catching onscreen menus; multiroom functionality
LOWS: Lightweight build; no 4K upscaling/screen mirroring; no ITV Player or 4OD; upscaling artefacts

Performance ★★★★★
Design ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT



Panasonic DMP-BDT370

→ £100 approx
→ www.panasonic.co.uk
→ Tel: 0844 844 3899

HIGHS: Stylish design; 4K upscaling and JPEG playback; intuitive home screen; good DVD upscaling
LOWS: Build quality; cumbersome apps menu; no ITV Player or 4OD; Netflix button placement

Performance ★★★★★
Design ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT



Samsung BD-J5900

→ £90 approx → www.samsung.co.uk
→ Tel: 0330 726 7864

HIGHS: Curved design; generous features for the money; quick DLNA browsing
LOWS: Limited internet content with no terrestrial catch-up; won't stream FLAC or MKV; minor upscaling artefacts; lightweight

Performance ★★★★★
Design ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT



Sony BDP-S5500

→ £100 approx → www.sony.co.uk
→ Tel: 0845 6000 124

HIGHS: Revamped menu system; good range of internet apps; smooth DLNA playback; fast boot-up and disc loading; Advanced Super Wi-Fi
LOWS: No 4K upscaling or multiroom support; no ITV Player or 4OD catch-up; build quality

Performance ★★★★★
Design ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★

4K

SONY



Seeing is believing

True 4K Home Cinema is closer than you think



Experience movies in a whole new dimension with incredible, cinematic 4K detail, at home. At over four times the resolution of Full HD, see pictures come to life with sharper-than-ever colour and enhanced contrast for viewing you'd expect from the professional screen.

Get closer with our 4K Home Cinema projector line-up.

Find out more at pro.sony.eu/4K-home

AUDIOVISUAL — ONLINE —

- Home Cinema
- Hi-Fi
- Speakers
- Brackets

- Accessories
- Cables
- Furniture
- Mounts

**Free Next
Day Delivery**

To most mainland
UK addresses. On
orders over £50.



INTRODUCING ...

★ AV CLUB

Simply register or login at AudioVisual Online and you're in the club! Updated with new offers constantly so check back often.

Your Account

DEAL

DEAL

DEAL

DEAL

DEAL

DEAL

www.audiovisualonline.co.uk

£0

Completely Free

Registration is free for all users of the website.

%

Huge Savings

Once you're logged in you can browse our current offers.

/

Clearance Deals

Loads of showroom clearance deals.

!

Instant Access

Quick and easy to register.

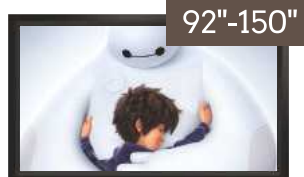


SPITFIRE CINEMA

Four fantastic flavours at great prices

The affordable cinema experience in your home.

Fixed Frame

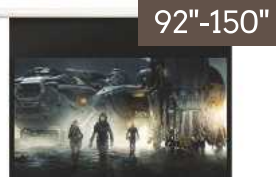


92"-150"

- ✓ High grade screen fabric
- ✓ Quality 4" velvet frame
- ✓ Easy assembly
- ✓ Acoustically transparent

From
£400

Electric

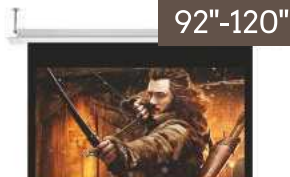


92"-150"

- ✓ Remote control
- ✓ Flexible installation
- ✓ Wall or ceiling mount
- ✓ Motorised

From
£435

In-Ceiling

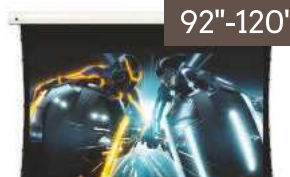


92"-120"

- ✓ Hidden screen system
- ✓ Flexible control options
- ✓ Quiet motor design
- ✓ Quality Materials

From
£460

Tab Tension



92"-120"

- ✓ High grade HD screen fabric
- ✓ Motorised screen
- ✓ Remote & 12v trigger control
- ✓ Wall or ceiling mount

From
£725

0% Finance available

From £500, terms apply.

AudioVisual Online acts as a credit intermediary and only offers credit products from Pay4Later Ltd and Close Brothers Retail Finance. Credit provided subject to age and status.



Representative example

Purchase price	£1499	Payment p/m	£56.25
Deposit	£149	Total repayable	£1499
Amount of credit	£1350	Duration	24 Months

Best Prices Online

Prices checked daily.
Seen something
online cheaper?





audiovisualonline.co.uk
01706 878444



Book an Appointment

Get in touch with us to demo the latest gear.

**ON
DEMO**



Monitor Audio Apex AV
5.1 Speaker Package



Monitor Audio Silver
5.1 Speaker Package



Epson EH-TW9200 Full
HD 3D Projector

Sony VPL-HW40ES Black Full HD
3D Home Cinema Projector



<p>RX-A550 5.1 Channel AV Receiver YAMAHA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wireless Streaming ✓ 4K Ultra HD ✓ High Performance ✓ HDMI 3D with ARC <p>Only £549</p>	<p>TX-NR646 7.2 Channel AV Receiver ONKYO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dolby atmos ✓ Bluetooth ✓ Wi-Fi ✓ Apple AirPlay <p>Only £549</p>	<p>NR1606 7.2 Channel Receiver marantz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dolby atmos ✓ Bluetooth ✓ Wi-Fi ✓ Full 4K Ultra HD <p>Only £Call</p>	<p>AVR-X2200W 7.2 Channel Receiver DENON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dolby atmos ✓ Bluetooth ✓ Wi-Fi ✓ Full 4K Ultra HD <p>Only £499</p>
<p>RX-A1050 7.2 Channel AV Receiver YAMAHA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wireless Streaming ✓ 4K Ultra HD ✓ Bluetooth ✓ HDMI 3D with ARC <p>Only £Call</p>	<p>TX-RZ900 7.2 Channel Receiver ONKYO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bluetooth ✓ Wi-Fi ✓ Apple AirPlay ✓ Dolby Atmos <p>Only £1349</p>	<p>SR5010 7.2 Channel Receiver marantz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dolby atmos ✓ Bluetooth ✓ Wi-Fi ✓ Full 4K Ultra HD <p>Only £749</p>	<p>AVR-X5200W 9.2 Channel Receiver DENON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dolby atmos ✓ Apple AirPlay ✓ Wi-Fi ✓ Full 4K Ultra HD <p>Only £1199</p>

<p>GRANDVIEW Cinema Screens</p> <p>From £499</p>	<p>DLA-X500 Home Cinema Projector JVC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 2 Year Warranty ✓ Remote access 3D modes ✓ Ultra Quiet operation <p>£Call</p>	<p>VPL-HW55ES HD 3D Projector SONY</p> <p>19th March 2014 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>£2795</p>	<p>YSP-2500 Digital Soundbar YAMAHA</p> <p>1st October 2014 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>Was: £799.00 £Call</p>
<p>Zensor 5 White 5.1 Speaker Package DALI</p> <p>18th October 2011 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>£1449</p>	<p>TX-NR3030 11.2 Channel AV Receiver ONKYO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 4K Upscaling ✓ Apple Airplay ✓ Dolby Atmos <p>Was: £2499.00 £Call</p>	<p>ASB-2 Airstream Soundbar MONITOR AUDIO</p> <p>23rd December 2014 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>Was: £999 £699</p> <p>30% OFF</p>	<p>Radius R90HT1 5.1 Speaker Package MONITOR AUDIO</p> <p>19th September 2008 WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★</p> <p>£1499</p>

Soundbars... and a soundbase, too

Adrian Justins spends time with no fewer than seven audio-boosting add-ons, from premium propositions to budget considerations

SOUNDBARS AND SOUNDBASES are probably home cinema's biggest success story of the last few years. Where once the industry strived to sell the cash-conscious film fan an all-in-one multichannel system, it has now changed tack and is focusing on single-enclosure solutions (with a wireless subwoofer, natch). For the consumer, these are easier to accommodate in the typical living room and easier to setup. For the retailer, they're easier to demo. For everyone bar the stalwart separates junkie, they're a good thing.

New models, from a wide range of brands, are being launched at a startling pace. With

that in mind, here we've assembled seven current options. There's no overriding theme here; instead they represent the diversity of the market. For instance, Maxell's Split is an

'For the consumer, these are easy to accommodate in a typical living room and easy to set up'

affordable feature-stripped soundbar with a neat trick up its sleeve, while Philips' Fidelio XS1 stands out as a designer soundbase with forward-thinking connectivity.

Cost considerations

Price wise, this selection ranges from £110 to £580. Generally speaking, the more you're prepared to pay, the better a sonic performance you will get. However, other considerations – including bonus features such as Bluetooth streaming, HDMI switching and multiroom support, not to mention design and form factor – will impact your buying choice.

£200 approx → www.evolveaudio.co.uk

Evolve Audio SB-2501

Nothing fancy here, but neither is the price tag



EVOLVE AUDIO'S SB-2501'S spec sheet is hardly the stuff of AV dreams – there's no HDMI connectivity, or Dolby and DTS decoding. However, this reasonably-priced soundbar does proffer apt-X compatible Bluetooth and a separate 6in subwoofer with wireless hookup. And the SB-2501 comes with a pair of Bluetooth headphones for late-night listening without disturbing the rest of the household. Using the cans automatically mutes the soundbar until it's manually un-muted.

Like the Orbitound A70 model (see p74), Evolve Audio relies upon phase-based technology to create its soundfield. But the speaker array here is quite different, with four forward-facing 40mm drivers situated at opposite ends.

The 'bar isn't likely to find itself in the Design Museum at any time but is well built from aluminium and has grilles at either side covering the drivers. Operating it is easy, with a simple but classy remote and an LED light that can be turned off.

You can't adjust the EQ aside from the bass but there are four effects modes – Music, Movie, News and Sport. As you scroll through the modes the EQ changes so that higher frequencies are more prominent. Daytime TV shows and sports may benefit from suitable mode selection but don't be surprised if the Music mode proves the most satisfying regardless of the genre.

With movies and dramas it becomes apparent that the SB-2501 is a tad unrefined.

Dialogue can sound harsh but generally the delivery of effects is nicely balanced. *Fantastic Mr Fox* (BD) sounds quite meaty – a motor car reversing has all of the throatiness that Wes Anderson intended. The bass is subtle, but somewhat bereft of welly. A 3D mode does seem to lift higher-frequency sounds in the mix but isn't remotely a surround sound effect.

HCC VERDICT

Evolve Audio SB-2501 → £200

Overall ★★★★★

£300 approx → www.lg.com/uk

LG LAS550H

Can this soundbar offer a performance to match its feature set?

THE LAS550H TICKS a lot of boxes: compact, premium-quality build and design, HDMI connectivity with Dolby Digital and DTS decoding, wireless subwoofer and Bluetooth audio streaming.

In the flesh the LG is an attractive beast with a strong, curved metal grille, low-profile silver buttons and nicely styled subwoofer. At 51mm high the 'bar fits neatly on a tabletop stand without encroaching on your viewing pleasure and its jack pack is recessed but wide enough to accommodate thick-collared HDMI leads. It can be operated by a Bluetooth-connected smartphone app but the supplied remote is a fine example of handset layout.

Behind the grille is a scrolling LED display that is legible but far too bright, and quite a distraction in low ambient light. You can choose from a number of DSP modes and adjust treble, bass and sub levels.

Sonically, the LAS550H is a bit of a let down. It's like a souped-up boy racer – there's

plenty of power but little sense of refinement. The problems are an overzealous bass that is impossible to calm and slightly shrill treble. *Veep* (Sky Atlantic) sounds thin and not much better than my TV's speakers; with *Brave* on BD there's good clarity to effects such as horse hooves in the grass, Merida's footsteps and the sounds of wood carving, but the bass-heavy orchestration in the witch's cottage is so strong that it threatens to overwhelm the dialogue. The roars of a huge bear are wince-inducing.

Overall, the LAS550H falters where it counts most – sonically, which is a shame given the feature and design talents on show.



HCC VERDICT

LG LAS550H → £300

Overall ★★★★★

£110 approx → uk.maxell.eu

Maxell Split

Want genuine stereo? Check this out



THE SPLIT SOUNDBAR (AKA the Maxell MXSP-TS1000) is not intended to divide opinion. Rather its name is derived from its ability to break in half and operate as two upright stereo speakers. Not a bad trick for a model that costs around £110.

There's no subwoofer and the spec is somewhat elementary. Connectivity comprises just one optical digital audio input and a 3.5mm line in. There are no decoders so all video sources must be set to output PCM or you'll hear nowt. Bluetooth is SBC rather than quasi-CD-quality apt-X.

Design-wise, the Split flatters to deceive, looking more expensive than it is thanks to its high-gloss finish and gently curved edges. But it is pretty strong, which is just as well as you have to give it a good wrench if attempting to divide the model in two (pictured). A couple of innocuous stands are provided for the vertical configuration, tethered by some speaker wire. There's no display, just

three tiny LEDs to indicate the source. The remote is a cheap but functional credit-card type with blister buttons. DSP modes are Flat, Music and Movie.

Maxell rates its power at 2 x 20W, and confidently suggests its frequency response bottoms out at 40Hz. In truth, this model lacks low-end grunt. Heavy artillery fire during the train attack/crash in *The Expendables 3* (BD) is a bit tame. On the other hand, the soundfield is quite spacious (even with the Split in soundbar form) and the Maxell keeps a tight grip on things so that dialogue and effects are quite impactful. Clarity and refinement aren't the best, though: Sly Stallone sounds rougher than sandpaper. Then again, when doesn't he?

The Split lacks the firepower to really deliver cinematic thrills, but if funds are low or you have a second-room TV to beef up, it makes a worthwhile audition.

HCC VERDICT

Maxell Split → £110

Overall ★★★★★

Panasonic SC-HTB885

With its 5.1 driver array and 4K/60p passthrough, this angled soundbar targets high-end AV enthusiasts



IF YOU WANT to boost the audio of a flatscreen TV mounted on a tabletop the options are to either buy a soundbase speaker, a tallish soundbar that will need a compatible AV rack, or opt for a letterbox-thin model that won't obscure the screen but may be compromised by the size of its drivers. Panasonic literally takes a laid-back approach to the problem, with the SC-HTB885 featuring drivers (including 2.5in full-range units and dedicated tweeters) set at about 25 degrees. The front of the wedge-shaped model is just 3cm tall, rising to 5cm at the rear, leaving your screen unimpeded (although the soundbar comes with a plug-in IR blaster just in case).

Wall-mounting is also feasible, in which case the soundbar is positioned with its back to the wall and the drivers facing the listener square-on (the unit automatically adjusts the direction of its output to suit orientation). One major advantage of wall-mounting the SC-HTB885 is that the LED display is visible, unlike when the bar is horizontal where it's impossible to see the display without getting out of your seat. This is annoying, especially as it has quite a complex operating system that is largely impossible to operate without seeing what you're doing. And I found the SC-HTB885 to be one of those models that can need re-calibrating according to whatever source or genre of material you're listening to...

Fully loaded

There's some decent tech under the hood here, including Dolby Digital and DTS decoding, HDMI switching, a virtual 5.1 soundfield, 4K passthrough, apt-X Bluetooth and a Clear Dialogue mode. At the Panasonic's heart is a 2nd-generation LincsD-Amp, designed to iron out jitter and distortion.

Setup is easy as far as the wireless 6.25in subwoofer goes, requiring no manual intervention. By default the 'bar is set to deliver '3D' sound through a blend of Dolby Virtual Speaker and some proprietary magic dust. This is applied to all DSP modes

(Standard, Stadium, Music, Cinema and News) except Stereo. Clear-Mode Dialogue can be temporarily disabled in the setup menu, as can Harmonic Bass enhancement and Auto Gain Control. You can also set the subwoofer level, dialogue level and low volume mode (dialogue enhancer).

A fair few toys to play around with then, and I'd recommend starting with the Stereo mode, which produces a decent soundfield that's well balanced in terms of frequency response, capable of dynamic punch and has good levels of detail. This seems the most satisfying option for sports where the balance between commentary, players' actions and crowd noises is spot on. Dramas such as *True Detective* benefitted from switching to Cinema mode, which seemed to work better at delivering the muttered, downbeat dialogue.

The subwoofer is a powerful beast with the potency of a demented, caged lion. Low-frequency sounds (orchestration included) can become boomy regardless of the DSP mode selected or the positioning of the sub (away from walls, etc). Minimising its roar is required.

The SC-HTB885 really excels with Blu-ray soundmixes, bringing terrific levels of clarity and nuance to *Fantastic Mr Fox*. It projects everything deep in to the room, endowing soundtrack details with gorgeous believability. Everything from the thud of a slamming car door to the delicate ticking of a watch impresses. And with the subwoofer in check, it proved to be adept at handling showstopping LFE moments, with credible extension and integration.

Going the distance

Overall, the SC-HTB885 is a fine (if pricey) example of a soundbar that goes the extra mile. Panasonic's design is smart (ignoring that LED display hiccup), it's well-connected and the onboard driver/amp arrangement is capable of an insightful, thrilling performance. Be prepared to tweak the settings, though.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 2.5in bass-reflex woofers; 2 x 1in semi-dome tweeters; 1 x 2.5in full-range cone

AMPLIFICATION: 250W

CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI inputs; 1 x HDMI output (ARC); digital optical audio; USB (service port); IR blaster

DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No

SEPARATE SUB: Yes. 250W, 6.25in woofer

REMOTE CONTROL: Yes

DIMENSIONS: 1,125(w) x 51(h) x 121(d)mm

WEIGHT: 3.1kg

FEATURES: DSP modes (Standard, Stadium, Music, Cinema, News, Stereo); Clear-Mode Dialogue; Harmonic Bass enhancement; Auto Gain Control; wall-mounting, wireless sub; Bluetooth (apt-X); NFC; LincsD-Amp; Music Streaming app; 4K/60p passthrough; IR blaster

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic SC-HTB885

→ £580 approx → www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Tel: 0344 844 3899

HIGHS: Excellent clarity with Blu-rays; decent build quality; versatile menu options

LOWS: Subwoofer prone to excess boominess; illegible display because of angle

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Philips Fidelio XS1

A soundbase with a separate sub? That's novel

FLATTER THAN THE average soundbase with forward- (two dedicated centre channel speakers) and side-facing drivers, there's no denying how chic the XS1 looks. However, in order to maintain a healthy bass reproduction, Philips has had to supply a separate (wireless) subwoofer, which almost creates a new product category entirely. Said sub is also thin and flat, and can be orientated vertically or horizontally. You might even want to shove it under the sofa.

The spec is as impressive as the design, featuring HDMI in/out (an extra input would have been useful), coax and optical ports, built-in decoders for Dolby and DTS, apt-X flavoured Bluetooth and NFC operation.

The remote is classy but has thin buttons with tiny fonts – hard to read in daylight, let alone dimly-lit rooms. Use this to tweak the bass and treble, and in terms of DSP modes, switch between Music and Movies.



Music mode maintains sharp focus, with a close-knit, agreeable soundfield, while Movies opens up the performance but keeps a handle on the midrange. If dialogue gets a little lost then a Voice enhancer is on hand to boost the relevant frequencies.

True Detective (Sky) showcases rich and resonant dialogue, and musical flourishes such as a kettle drum are easy on the ear. Blu-ray movies, meanwhile are a knockout. The train crash sequence at the start of *The Expendables 3* is busy and boisterous, but the XS1 does a sterling job elevating the growly

voices of Jason Statham and Sly Stallone above the cacophonous music and hard-hitting gunfire. Move on to streamed music and the joy continues; the alt-electronica of PSB's *Spitfire* is sweet and involving. Good work!

HCC VERDICT

Philips Fidelio XS1 → £500

Overall ★★★★★

£150 approx → www.uk.yamaha.com

Yamaha YAS-93

This big 'bar at a low price impresses

MOST SOUNDBARS ARRIVE with a separate subwoofer to handle bass. Not all, of course: Q Acoustics' Media 4 is one example where the lack of a sub is little concern.

However, such models are only really worth considering if they have a big enough cabinet/driver array to produce decent LF.

As such, they're not likely to be super-slim.

Yamaha's YAS-93 is of the same ilk. It stands fully 11cm high – not a problem if you're happy to wall-mount or have space in your AV stand, but a potential deal-breaker otherwise.

A bass reflex port runs most of the 89cm length of the bar. The driver suite comprises dual 3in subwoofers and dual 2.5in full-range cones. With no HDMI terminals or Bluetooth audio, this model is firmly in budget territory. The absence of the latter precludes compatibility with Yamaha's smartphone app and its pre-set listening modes (available on the step-up YAS-103 model) so you're limited to more basic surround/stereo options, plus

volume, bass adjustment, Clear Voice mode and Uni Volume features. Digital connectivity at least embraces coaxial as well as optical, and Dolby and DTS decoders are provided.

The YAS-93 pumps out a rich, coherent sound from a range of sources. The Clear Voice mode pays dividends with sport and dramas – the aforementioned mumbles of Colin Farrell and Vince Vaughn in *True Detective* are picked out nicely.

Movies are handled well too. Yamaha's chunky bar delivers lots of subtle detail in the verbal and physical exchanges of *Divergent* on BD. The woofers offer depth and scale and mesh nicely with the main drivers, but can reverberate when caught unawares by a sudden explosion.

The YAS-93 requires a touch of re-calibration as you alternate between sources/content, and requires thought about installation – but is impressively refined for the money.



Yamaha's YAS-93 features a quartet of drivers – two woofers, two full-range – and a lengthy bass reflex port

HCC VERDICT

Yamaha YAS-93 → £150

Overall ★★★★★

Orbitsound A70

There's something in the air with this premium bar/sub duo...

ORBITSOUND FIRST MADE (sound) waves in 2008 with a range of shoebox-sized iPod speaker docks that happened to also function nicely as soundbar substitutes. Post-dock era, it now makes a slew of similarly-sized soundbars as well as a couple of soundbases. The secret of its success has been its proprietary phase-based AirSound technology, which blends front and side-firing speakers with sonic processing to strive to eliminate the traditional sweet spot.

The A70 is the first conventionally shaped Orbitsound soundbar, with dimensions akin to a row of about four house bricks joined end to end. The finish and build quality couldn't be more different than a bricky's handiwork, with a hand-polished, high-gloss piano black cabinet made from 'engineered' wood.

The driver array comprises side-facing neodymium mid-rangers at either end, with two 2in drivers and a tweeter centrally placed. All drivers are sheathed beneath metal cheese-grater style grilles. To the left of centre is a touch-sensitive control panel that lights up when pressed, on the right is a display with a row of LEDs that blink whenever the volume, bass or treble are adjusted. It also has indicators to show the source and a red light to alert if the sub is not wirelessly connected, rather like old-school oil and battery lights on a car. This hardly fills me with confidence. It's almost as if Orbitsound expects its subs to lose wireless connection, which did happen once or twice.

Input importance

Considering the £500 ticket, connectivity disappoints. This is an HDMI-free zone and there are only two inputs – one optical and one 3.5mm aux. You do get Bluetooth, apt-X compatible with NFC pairing.

Nor are there Dolby Digital or DTS decoders but the A70 does have one bonus feature, which is the ability to be programmed so that your TV's remote can control its volume, helping to streamline operation.

Considering it stretches across most of the A70's fascia, the display isn't that easy to read from a distance, partly because the backlight is weak in ambient light and can't be adjusted, and because some of the icons are smaller than a ladybird's eyelashes.

The remote is a bit weird, with oblong buttons, but since there is no menu for setup or calibration options it's easy to operate and does have the virtue of controlling play/pause and track skip control of any Bluetooth-connected audio devices.

With nothing more than volume, bass and treble adjustments, Orbitsound bets the farm on the pre-set DSP. Compared with the faffing around with models such as Panasonic's HTB885 this is liberating, especially since the A70 just about nails it as far as its sound goes, delivering an expansive soundstage with no shortcomings or excesses throughout the dynamic range. Anchoring everything is the subwoofer, which has good extension and a tight punch with sounds such as a heavy car engine in *True Detective* and the explosions during the rescue in *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Individual effects have good clarity, maybe not quite as pin-sharp as similarly priced rivals, but nonetheless quite distinct. Dialogue is warm and inviting, a skill which helps the A70 deliver the goods with music streamed via Bluetooth ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in tweeter; 2 x 2in and 2 x 1.5in midbass drivers

AMPLIFICATION: 120W

CONNECTIONS: Optical digital audio input; 3.5mm aux input

DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No

SEPARATE SUB: Yes. 180W, 6.25in driver

REMOTE CONTROL: Yes

DIMENSIONS: 750(w) x 74(h) x 65(d)mm

WEIGHT: 1.95kg

FEATURES: Wall-mounting, wireless sub; apt-X Bluetooth with NFC; remote control learning; backlit touchpanel; bass, treble, volume adjustment via remote control



HCC VERDICT

Orbitsound A70

→ £500 approx → www.orbitsound.com

→ Tel: 0207 294 7331

HIGHS: Compact, elegant design; simple to operate; impressive all-round sound

LOWS: No HDMI inputs; no DD or DTS decoding; subwoofer wireless link proved unstable

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



The A70 is gorgeously designed

PURE[®]
T H E A T R E

BRING YOUR ROOM TO
LIFE AND EXPERIENCE THE
ULTIMATE IN BIG SCREEN
HOME ENTERTAINMENT.
WHETHER IT'S MOVIES,
GAMING, SPORT OR TV
YOU CAN WATCH IT ALL IN
AMAZING FULL HD & 4K



HOME CINEMA EVOLVED



Pure Theatre™ is a British company based in Shropshire, specialising in the design and manufacture of state of the art home cinema products, here in the United Kingdom.

Modern projectors in Full HD, 3D and 4K allow for large screen sizes. Recent advances in technology make projectors bright, whilst providing a long life span, making them perfect for watching TV, gaming and movies.

Call 01952 898 522 or visit puretheatre.com





LONG-TERM TEST

Yamaha RX-A3040

TIME ON TEST **Eleven months** REVIEWER **Ed Selley**

WHEN YAMAHA LAUNCHED the RX-A3040 late last Summer, it was one of the very first Dolby Atmos-capable receivers available in the UK – although Yamaha didn't actually come good with the Atmos decoding for a month or so after release. And priced at £2,000, it was Yamaha's flagship integrated AV option. Nothing sat above it in the pecking order bar the (non-Atmos) CX-A5000/MX-A5000 processor/amp duo. Now, with a new model in the works, you can grab the RX-A3040 for around £1,400, which is a good saving. The question, of course, is should you?

What's good about it?

When the RX-A3040 turned up for review, it was effectively judged as a normal AV receiver as the Atmos decoding wasn't 'live' and there was very little Atmos material to test on it even if it had been. Without the killer feature, though, the Yamaha still blew me away. Nearly a year down the line and very

little has changed. The RX-A3040 combines prodigious power (its rated at 9 x 150W into eight Ohms) with truly top-notch processing. The result is a receiver that really can generate a cinematic performance.

Furthermore, it can coax such a performance out of a very wide variety of speakers. Those reserves of power mean that even comparatively challenging loads have proved absolutely no problem for it even at positively antisocial levels.

Yamaha's YPAO auto setup has proved consistently accurate in use and does a fine job of setting speakers for satisfying day-to-day use rather than a more aggressive, pin-you-to-the-sofa style arrangement. The result of this has been that regardless of whether I'm watching a blockbuster Blu-ray on Friday night or CBeebies at seven o'clock Saturday morning, the Yamaha sounds good, offering an appealing blend of subtlety, scale, aggression and smoothness.

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Dolby Atmos nine-channel AV receiver

POSITION: Yamaha's top model in 2014

PEERS: Denon AVR-X7200WA; Pioneer SC-LX88

The presence of my very young son for the duration of the test has shown up some other positive aspects of the RX-A3040. Did you know that when you press the receiver's front-mounted Pure Direct button, the button glows an attractive blue colour and there is a pause of about a second in the audio while the Yamaha closes down various bits of the circuit? I do because, without any exaggeration, Master Selley has pushed this button several hundred times. Despite this, the button and the functions it relates to perform in exactly the same way that they did on the day it arrived. The combined impact of pre-school inquisition and using the Yamaha as my reference receiver has resulted in a hard life for it, but nothing has gone awry or fallen off. This is a very well-built amplifier indeed.

It is also one that has really delivered on the promised Smart functionality. With a large rubber mat now protecting the Yamaha from

'This amp serves up an appealing blend of subtlety, scale, aggression and smoothness'

little fingers, I have become dependent upon the app to control it. Both the iOS and especially the Android iteration, which can put a little four-block widget of the main controls on your phone screen, have been so effective at controlling the Yamaha that even when I do have the option to drive it by line of sight, I don't bother.

The Spotify Connect and internet radio functionality are genuinely excellent in the real world. As a bonus, you can use the Bubble app on Android to send the Tidal lossless streaming service to it. Musicality is another of the RX-A3040's strong points. This amp loves to showcase its hi-fi sensibilities.

Connectivity is almost overwhelming – Yamaha has endowed its top-line receiver with eight HDMI inputs and two outputs, plus plenty of other hookups. It makes for a packed back panel, and in reality I've had no need for three-in/one-out component video, nor the composite video bank. Others might, of course.

And Atmos? Well, I remain fairly neutral about the format but that isn't the fault of this powerhouse. The RX-A3040 simply augments its exceptional processing and adds an extra layer of audio immersion to the performance. Atmos setup and

connection is totally logical for anyone trying it out for the first time, and the power supply and amplification of the Yamaha are up to the task of driving nine channels (you can add a stereo amp for 11-channel if you need) at the sort of volumes that make *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* almost worth watching. Almost.

What's not so good about it?

Against this tsunami of positivity, there isn't much I can say against the RX-A3040. The lack of backlighting and a very busy button layout make the remote little fun to deal with in a darkened room. It also doesn't feel like it is built to the same standard as the receiver itself. So stick to the app, basically.

On the receiver itself, the only functionality that has proved anything less than bombproof is the Audio Return Channel. Although I've diligently followed instructions on best practice to set it up, it still seems to depend on me going into the settings menu and flicking the ARC option off then on again. As life is a bit short for that, I've run an additional optical cable between my flatscreen and the RX-A3040 and this works fine. If you are replacing an amp where you have been using ARC a great deal, it is something to be aware of, though.

Other concerns are related to what this receiver doesn't do. Firstly, there's no upgrade path for DTS:X decoding. Secondly, the HDMI stage doesn't include HDCP 2.2 support (it will passthrough 4K at 60Hz, however). Lastly, Bluetooth is an optional extra, via a dongle.

Should I buy it?

That depends on your needs. On the face of it, the lack of HDCP 2.2 is a setback for anyone serious about embracing 4K video. However, I expect there to be workarounds

for this, including disc players with split outputs. The absence of DTS:X could be more of a deal-breaker – you will need to ponder whether you are going to make use of object-based surround. Although I have tested Atmos speaker packages with the Yamaha, I make no apologies for saying that the best the RX-A3040 has sounded has been with the Neat Motive and Sonus faber Venere systems, which had no height information at all. If you can't see yourself going for dedicated height channels, you won't be using the height format you have let alone the one you don't.

These considerations aside, the Yamaha remains a brilliant AV receiver. It has been a delight to use and I can't imagine anyone who buys one not falling in love with it. As new tech arrives, it doesn't make what came before unpalatable – especially at the price you can now find it ■

ON THE MENU



→ While the app offers slicker control, the Yamaha's onscreen menus are up to the job, with graphical representations of speaker layouts helping novices get set up

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes. Plus Dolby Atmos, Dolby Digital EX, Pro-Logic IIx

DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes. Plus DTS-ES/EX/24/96/Neo 6

THX: No

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: Yes. 7.1-channel

MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):

9 x 150W (eight ohms, two channels driven, 0.06% THD)

MULTIROOM: Yes. 3 zones

AV INPUTS: Yes. 5 x composite; 6 x digital audio (3 x optical and 3 x coaxial)

HDMI: 8 x inputs, 2 x outputs, v2.0

VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K

COMPONENT VIDEO: 3 x inputs, 1 x output

DIMENSIONS: 435(w) x 192(h) x 467(d)mm

WEIGHT: 19.6kg

ALSO FEATURING: YPAO multi-point automatic calibration; integrated Wi-Fi; optional Bluetooth; compatible with Yamaha's AV Controller app (iOS/Android); AirPlay, Spotify Connect, Napster, Rhapsody and internet radio; 23 DSP modes; dialogue lift function; Pure Direct mode; Compressed Music Enhancer; High-Resolution Music Enhancer; ESS SABRE32 Ultra DAC for seven main channels; 4K passthrough to 60p; 11.2-channel pre-outs; MHL support; USB input; Aventure/Total Purity construction

HCC VERDICT

Yamaha RX-A3040

→ £1,400 approx → uk.yamaha.com

→ Tel: 0844 811 1116

HIGHS: Wonderfully powerful and immersive sound; solid build quality; excellent feature set and control app; integrated Wi-Fi makes networking easy

LOWS: No DTS:X upgrade; no support for HDCP 2.2; Bluetooth is an optional extra

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



It's 'buttons ahoy' with Yamaha's handset

WIN

AN OPPO AUDIO BUNDLE WORTH £600!



THIS ISSUE, WE'VE teamed up with AV expert Oppo to give away a cracking combo of personal audio products in the shape of its PM-3 headphones and HA-2 portable headphone amp/DAC. And to win this bundle, all you have to do is answer our brain-teaser!

The PM-3 cans typically retail for £350 and cater for those seeking the ultimate in comfort and audiophile performance. A closed-back design, the PM-3 employs carefully matched 55mm planar magnetic drivers derived from the Best Buy-winning PM-1 flagship (see *HCC* #235), offering a balanced, nuanced performance across the frequency range. Music and movies are delivered with bass punch, smooth mid-range details and clean high frequencies, plus accurate stereo imaging.

The 'phones are designed with the user in mind. At just 320g, they sit lightly, but with thick padded earpads and headband for a snug fit. They come with a denim carry-case to keep them protected, and both 1.2m and 3m cables are supplied – the latter perfect for hookup to your home cinema receiver.

Although the high sensitivity (102dB) of the PM-3 headphones make them an ideal direct partner for any

mobile device, the second part of our prize giveaway is the £260 Oppo HA-2, an ultra-slim portable headphone amp/DAC that will ensure you can get premium sound quality from any source, be it at home or on the move.


State-of-the-art silicon

Roughly the size of a smartphone, the stylish HA-2 features a smart black leather casing offset by white stitching and aluminium trim. State-of-the-art silicon lurks inside, including an ESS Sabre32 Reference DAC supporting 384kHz PCM and DSD256, and a Class AB amplifier able to drive even the most power-hungry headphone designs.

There are two USB DAC inputs – one for Apple iPhone/iPods, the other for Android devices, PCs and Macs – plus a 3.5mm input for other non-USB gadgets. Whatever device you're using, the HA-2 will have it covered. And courtesy of its 3000mAh power plant (fully chargeable in 90 minutes via Oppo's bespoke VOOC tech) you can use the HA-2 to recharge external devices, too.

Together, the PM-3 and HA-2 are a delightful sonic duo blessed with beautiful design and high-end performance. If you want them, enter our competition now! ■

Oppo's PM-3 and HA-2: a cracking audio combo



'The PM-3 and HA-2 are a delightful sonic duo blessed with beautiful design and high-end performance'

For more information about Oppo's range of headphones, amps and Blu-ray players visit:
www.oppodigital.co.uk

Be in with a chance of winning the Oppo PM-3 and HA-2 bundle by answering the following film-related question:

Q: Killer robot ED-209 features in which 1980s science-fiction movie?

- A)** The Running Man
- B)** Short Circuit
- C)** RoboCop

HOW TO ENTER:

Simply email your answer (either A, B or C) to competitions@homecinemachoice.com with the subject line 'Oppo'. You must include your name, address and contact telephone number.

The closing date for this competition is October 2, 2015. Please read the terms and conditions (below) before sending in your entry.

Competition rules

1. The first entry drawn at random will win the prize. **2.** Only one entry per person/household; multiple entries will be discarded. **3.** Entrants from the UK only. **4.** Employees of MyTimeMedia Ltd and companies supplying competition prizes are not eligible to enter this competition. **5.** Please ensure your personal details are correct, as they will be used to contact you if you win. **6.** No alternatives, cash or otherwise, will be offered to the winner as prizes. **7.** The editor's decision is final. **8.** Comp winner's info available upon request. **9.** The closing date for entries is October 2, 2015.

How smart is your home?



Home Cinema, TV, Music, Lighting, Curtains & Blinds, Heat & Cool, Access Control & Security.

Whether it's a one room man cave, or a whole-home automation system, we provide a personalised smart home experience to enhance your life and provide comfort, convenience and peace of mind

PROGRESSIVE
HOME TECHNOLOGY

Progressive Home Technology
The Old Saw Mill, Langton Road, Speldhurst, Tunbridge Wells Kent TN3 0JU

01892 860801
progressive-ht.com

SAPPHIRE

"Ultimate Range"
of Tab Tensioned In-ceiling Screens

For when only the best will do ...



**5 Year
Warranty**

**SSP from
Only £1,416.00**

Imagine if

- * You had a screen that was almost invisible to visitors until in use. When you finish viewing the trap door closes magically to hide the fabric.
- * If the motor and the structure was designed to be whisper quiet.
- * If the screen was able to drop down automatically when you turn on your projector.
- * If the fabric was one of the best in the business for 4K projection giving vibrant colour with a perfectly flat soft tensioned surface.
- * If the product had a 5 year comprehensive warranty.

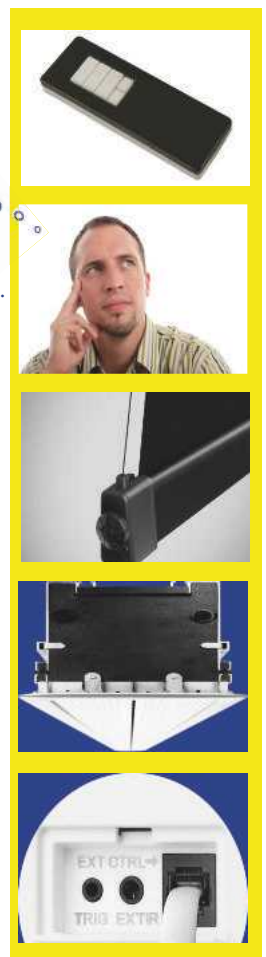
**Dreams are now
reality!**

Model Numbers	VIEWING SIZE (MM) (L+H)	SIZE (FEET)	CASING (MM) (L+H+D)	ASPECT
SETC200WSF-ATR	2030 x 1140	80" x 45"	2625 x 155 x 170	16:9
SETC240WSF-ATR	2340 x 1320	92" x 52"	2935 x 155 x 170	16:9
SETC270WSF-ATR	2670 x 1500	105" x 59"	3245 x 155 x 170	16:9

Available for next day delivery from many quality retailers and distributors in UK and Ireland

www.Sapphireav.com

QR
Code





DIGITAL COPY

Mark Craven has packed his bags and is ready for this year's IFA Expo, an AV extravaganza that deserves to be recognised as the best in the calendar – even if the show map sucks...

THE IFA TECHNOLOGY show is so close I can practically taste the bratwurst. It all kicks off on September 4, to be precise, with the world's global AV and electronics brands decamping to Berlin for six days of tub-thumping and product unveiling.

The IFA show is great for a number of reasons. Firstly, it's actually open to the general public, which puts it ahead of the International CES in the likability stakes. Wander around and you can get a taste of what real money-spending consumers think of new products. At CES, you just get a taste of what hell might be like – thousands of technology journalists falling over each other while trying to snap a picture of a new smartphone on their, erm, nearly-new smartphone.

And then there are the products themselves. **While January's CES has become increasingly about hardware that may perhaps see the light of day by the Summer, IFA debutants tend to land much quicker.** Grab sight of something in the Messe Berlin (an okay show venue let down by a mind-bogglingly complicated map – it's as if Maurits Cornelis Escher is alive and well and resident in Germany) and you can usually put it on your Christmas list.

This year many tech fans' 'Dear Santa' letters will have a 4K UHD Blu-ray player near the top. If the wind blows in the right direction, the stars align and someone doesn't forget to pay the FedEx bill, such players should be touching down in Berlin all spruced up and ready for a pre-Xmas sales push. Okay, that's a lot of ifs – I'm hedging my bets – but it still makes me excited.

And there's more lined up at IFA to make the imminent no-frills plane slog worth the hassle, including Yamaha's new Dolby Atmos-enabled

soundbar (smart idea), more DTS:X AV receivers than you can shake an HDMI cable at, and the Autumn/Winter TV ranges from the likes of Sony, Panasonic and Philips. If you happen to be anywhere in the vicinity come early September, grab yourself a ticket. They only cost €12 – yet another thing the organisers get right.

And the winner is...

A final reason why I'm pleased to be swapping Blighty for Berlin is that IFA sees the official handing over of the European Imaging and Sound Association (EISA) awards. In this issue (p111) you can see the AV amps, 4K TVs, home cinema projectors and more that this awards body (of which HCC is a member) has commended.

EISA has been praising products since the 1980s, when a few hardy tech journalists banded together to highlight innovations in the world of photography. Since then it has grown to encompass hi-fi, mobile devices, in-car electronics and home cinema video and audio. Its member magazines (now in excess of 40) come from all across Europe, from Russia in the east, Norway in the north and Greece in the south. *HCC* and its sister title *Hi-Fi News* bring some Anglo charm to proceedings.

Despite a few market differences (there are some brands, such as TV maker TCL, which are pushing hard on the continent but giving the UK a swerve), this melting pot of Euro technophiles share the same passions. From my side, that means hours of discussion about black levels, Quantum Dot technology and user interfaces. Much like a night in the pub with Steve May and John Archer – only the standard of English is actually better... ■

*Do you go to tech shows? Which ones?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Mark Craven is worried there's an entire part of the IFA show that he's not managed to find – and that Pioneer is in there launching new Kuro TVs





FILM FANATIC

Anton van Beek watches a lot of bad films when choosing which discs to include in each issue of *HCC*, and has decided it's time to share some prime examples with you...

AS YOU SHOULD have gathered from the title of this column, I watch a lot of films. According to my account on the free-to-join movie-centric social networking site Letterboxd.com (which I recommend to all film fans as a great way of keeping track of your viewing habits) I watched a total of 404 movies during the course of 2014.

Simple mathematics tell us that the 20 or so titles that I reviewed for each of the 13 issues of *HCC* leaves a fairly large number unaccounted for. A small(ish) proportion of these will have been trips to the cinema – I do get lured out of my home theatre on occasion. In 2014, such titles included *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *Captain America: The Winter Solider*.

Then there are the movies I choose to revisit on Blu-ray and DVD just for the fun of it. Here's an example: last year, Letterboxd reminds me, I decided to rattle through all 12 *Friday the 13th* flicks (including *Freddy vs. Jason* and the 2009 remake) between January 25 and February 11 – indicating that my US import *Friday the 13th: The Complete Collection* Blu-ray boxset must have made the journey across the Atlantic just previously.

And another slice of those 404 films will be those quote-unquote 'classics' that I've happened to stumble across while flicking through my TV's EPG late at night and can't resist watching.

Only such a circumstance can possibly account for a viewing of *Jaws 3* that I logged last March.

The rest, however, are drawn from the huge piles of review discs that are sent in to *HCC* every month. We get barrow-loads of silver platters, and unfortunately there is no room to feature them all. Decisions not to run with a particular DVD or BD are taken in order to provide a sense of balance to the

Playback section. Yet while there is no way that we could include all of the fright films I sit through, horror-hedz can rest easy in the knowledge that I have suffered a seemingly endless parade of direct-to-DVD schlock – *Killer Mermaids*, *Where the Devil Hides*, *Outpost III: Rise of the Spetsnaz...* – in order to find the handful of genre gems that do make it into this publication.

The stupid boy next door

This isn't to say that all of these other titles are completely worthless. Especially when, like myself, you have an appreciation for spectacularly stupid films. Which brings me neatly to one of the Blu-rays that didn't get a spot in Playback this issue: Universal Pictures' *The Boy Next Door*.

If you're unfamiliar with this stinker, it's a 2015 throwback to the erotic thrillers of the 1990s. Jennifer Lopez stars as a high school teacher who has a night of passion with the 19-year-old lad who has moved in to the house next door. He then turns out to be an obsessive psycho. D'oh!

The Boy Next Door is an insanely idiotic (not to mention cheap-looking) film. Nowhere is this better exemplified than the moment when J-Lo's young suitor presents her with a first edition of Homer's *Iliad* (pictured). That would be the epic Greek poem that originated over 3,000 years ago and which was first put to paper in the late 10th Century. And how did he come by this miraculous tome? Well, 'it was a buck at a garage sale'!

So, while it may not have merited a review, *The Boy Next Door* remains a gift for fans of calamitous cinema, and I'll be sure to bring others like it to your attention in the future ■

*How many films do you watch every month?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Anton van Beek has a worryingly encyclopedic knowledge of '90s erotic thrillers, particularly those starring the two Shannons (Tweed and Whirry)...



TURN THE VOLUME UP
FAB
CINEMAS

CALL 01727 226 121 NOW
LET'S DO BUSINESS



FAB AV Unit 6 St Albans Enterprise Centre Long Spring St Albans AL3 6EN T 01727 226 121 E sales@fabhomecinemas.co.uk W www.fabav.co.uk

This advertisement is intended to be upside down



PICTURE THIS

Not all LCD TVs are created equal, with VA and IPS variants yielding different image qualities. Calibrator **Vincent Teoh** discusses the strengths and weaknesses of both

WHILE MANY LCD TV brands exist on the market, you may be surprised to learn that when it boils down to it, there are only two types of LCD panels used on these televisions, and choosing one over the other can make or break your viewing experience depending on your needs.

I refer to VA (Vertical Alignment) and IPS (In-Plane Switching) LCD panels whose respective strengths and weaknesses produce such different picture characteristics that you could be forgiven for thinking they're from different planets altogether.

VA-type screens walk all over IPS when it comes to black level and contrast performance. IPS-type panels typically yield a simultaneous contrast ratio (brightest white divided by deepest black within the same frame) of 1000:1, whereas VA panels can go as high as 4000:1. The impact this has on your viewing experience cannot be overstated, because contrast performance remains the most important attribute influencing our perception of picture quality.

Compared with an IPS display, a TV equipped with a VA panel usually exhibits deeper blacks and more 'pop' to the image. Colours appear more vibrant too: the inkier the blacks, the purer the canvas that lets colours flourish. VA's larger dynamic range also allows for better expression of shadow detail (which tends to merge into the greyish blacks on IPS screens), contributing to significantly greater enjoyment of dark scenes.

The key weakness of VA-type panels is viewing angle: it's quite common for colours and contrast to wash out acutely beyond 30° to 40° from the centre, and lately this situation is exacerbated by the introduction of curved screens and quantum-dot film. Some low-quality VA LCDs are so bad that you'll see some colour shift just by tilting your head even when you're sitting bang in front of the TV.

By contrast (pun intended), TVs with IPS panels can retain their colour fidelity much better when viewed from the sides: there's generally very little drop-off in colours even up to 50° to 60° off-axis, although at such angles the image normally darkens, with blacks brightening up.

VA LCD panels used to suffer greatly from near-black motion smearing, leading many to believe that IPS's motion is cleaner, but with advancements in VA technology, this is seldom the case now. Any differences in colour accuracy and backlight uniformity between VA and IPS screens are down to the video processing, gamut implementation and LED lamp configuration, not due to the panels themselves.

So should you opt for a VA or IPS LCD television? It depends on your viewing habits and needs. If you have a big family, or frequently invite your friends around for movie nights, an IPS-based TV (or plasma/OLED, for that matter) might make sense. For daytime viewing, our eyes are less sensitive in picking up sub-par blacks and shadow detail owing to the presence of ambient light – IPS will suffice. But if you do your critical viewing in a dimly-lit room without having to compromise on your seating position, then there's no debate – VA is superior.

How do you find out whether a particular LCD TV uses a VA or IPS panel? Other than putting a microscope on screen, *HCC* reviews are usually telling. As a rule of thumb, deep blacks means VA; passive 3D, IPS; Samsung, VA; LG, IPS. That said, lately the lines are becoming blurred, with LG releasing VA-equipped models after the flak the company received for its IPS-based displays ■

*Is viewing angle a consideration in your movie room?
Email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Vincent Teoh has worked as a professional video calibrator for seven years and when he shuts his eyes at night all he can see are PLUGE patterns



Audio *Express*

Hot Deals on top brands, plus FREE **overnight*** delivery!

Prices Include VAT • Brand New Equipment (NOT graded) • 2 Year Guarantees • Authorised Dealers For 27 Years



Canton DM 50
Soundbase

~~£399~~ **£249**



Canton DM 75
Soundbase

~~£449~~ **£299**

HOME
CINEMA



Acoustic Energy
Radiance 8 Subwoofer

~~£750~~ **£249**



BLACK
or
WHITE

Focal Dome (5.1)
Home Cinema Speakers

~~£1500~~ **£699**



Yamaha RX-V677
Network 7.2 Receiver

~~£559~~ **£289**



Yamaha RX-A1040
(Mint, Ex-Dem)

~~£999~~ **£699**

DOLBY
ATMOS



Yamaha RX-A2040
(Mint, Ex-Dem)

~~£1499~~ **£799**

DOLBY
ATMOS



Yamaha RX-A3040
(Mint, Ex-Dem)

~~£1999~~ **£1399**

Over 250

www.audio-express.co.uk

Hot Deals!



Cyrus Lyric 09
CD / DAB / Network Amp

~~£3000~~ **£1599**



Cyrus Streamline All-in-one
Streamer / DAC / Amp

~~£1210~~ **£499**

PURE
STEREO



Cyrus Stream X2
Music Streamer

~~£1000~~ **£699**



Mono X 200 Signature
Mono Power Amps (1 pair)

~~£3900~~ **£1999**



Acoustic Energy
Radiance 2 Speakers

~~£1320~~ **£499**



Naim mu-so (Mint, Ex-Dem)
Wireless Music System

~~£895~~ **£825**



DALI MENTOR MENUET
Speakers

~~£849~~ **£549**



Canton InCeiling 865
In-ceiling Speakers (1 pair)

~~£399~~ **£179**

* Overnight delivery - terms and conditions apply; please see website for details.



Audio *Express*

Over 1000 five star customer reviews

"Shop with confidence!"



Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology?
Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **HCC** is here to help

Protect the BBC!

Thank you for my copy of *Interstellar* on Blu-ray – I entered the recent competition. What a great surprise. I first saw it at the cinema, and it was going on my Christmas list.

I always, every month without fail, purchased the original publication *What Video* since its first issue way back when I was a teenager. I now do the same with *HCC* and I am hooked on home cinema. Please keep up the excellent publication – let's hope the government's assault on the BBC does not result in privatisation through the back door, and a cut in funding to

the excellent programmes it provides with broadcasts in 5.1 HD. The BBC is for everyone and a bastion of British society, not a political pawn.

David John Bassett, via email

Martin Pipe replies: As you can see from my report on p12, the BBC, and its R&D department, is an important cog in the world of AV technology development. So regardless of whether or not you appreciate *Strictly Come Dancing*, it would be a shame if the forthcoming government funding review hindered its work. And, as you say, it remains at the forefront when it comes

to terrestrial 5.1 broadcasts. Enjoy *Interstellar*, too!

What about Laserdisc?

Hi. I loved the recent special 250th issue, but I feel that the number one home cinema innovation should have been Laserdisc. From Laserdisc we got CD, which then led to CD Video (remember those?), then to DVD and then finally to the hi-def discs, HD DVD and Blu-ray.

I used to have the original Philips Laserdisc player back in 1982, and then a Pioneer CLD-1450. So I think the unloved Laserdisc (by many people) should have been given the

number one spot!
Paul Kelly, Plymouth

Mark Craven replies: Laserdisc is indeed worthy of the highest praise – for home movie fans it was the format of choice until DVD finally took hold, and those large sleeves afforded space for some cracking artwork that you just don't get with today's dinky disc cases.

However, our feature celebrated the greatest home cinema innovations of the last 20 years – back to *HCC* #1 in 1995, to be precise. And in those days, Laserdisc was already long established. Hence its omission.

★ STAR LETTER...

Viewing distance? It depends on your room size!

The interesting article by Vincent Teoh asks readers to offer their views on the size of TV and viewing distance (*HCC* #249), so here are my own views.

For the vast majority of TV viewers, whether ordinary households or those who seek more of a home cinema experience, room sizes dictate both TV size and viewing distance. Your readers who are fortunate enough to have the room, and the money, to create real cinemas are probably the exception. Most TVs and accompanying sound systems for those wanting more than just a TV in the room have to be accommodated to the general living room space. Clearly this must dictate what size TV one can have.

Viewing distance is also related to the room and its furniture. Again, unless it is a large room and things can be

organised around the TV, viewing distance is rather limited. Vincent suggests a distance of up to twice the diagonal of the TV: for example, six to eight feet from a 55in TV. This is far closer than most people watch TV, and almost impossible with the average room setting. In my own case, a cottage, the room setting allows my TV to be in only one place, and a 42in set is the maximum – anything larger would dominate the room and anyway would not fit anywhere. Vincent's 'ideal' place for sitting would be for me about five to six feet from the screen. Apart from both myself and my partner feeling this is too close anyway, the room setting makes the actual distance we view about eight to nine feet

away, which he would feel is too far. I think this distance is probably the average – and TV sets of about 32-42in are probably the most usual.

These are some of my own views. In the end, is one watching TV for super sound and spectacular SFX, or for good drama, documentary, or entertainment? Mark Craven's article in the same issue suggesting that not worrying too much

about the latest 'Next Big Thing' is rather what this viewer feels. If a Blu-ray gives an excellent picture, should I be neurotic because I am a bit out of date?
Roger Payne, via email

Mark Craven replies: Of course you shouldn't Roger! And thanks for reminding us that 42in TVs can still cut the home cinema mustard.



Star letter-writer Roger wins the *Knights of Sidonia: Complete Series One Collection* Blu-ray courtesy of Animate. *Knights of Sidonia: Complete Series One Collection* is available to buy on DVD and Blu-ray from September 7, priced £30 and £40 respectively.



Denon's five-star
AVR-X7200WA

Germans have Blu-ray soul...

I read with interest Anton van Beek's article on importing Region B Blu-ray releases from outside the UK (*Film Fanatic*, HCC #249) and was reminded of an import I made myself a few years ago of the German release of *SoulBoy*, which deals with the quintessentially British 'Northern Soul' dance movement.

So why did I go for the German release over the British version? Simple. The movie has never been released on BD in the UK. Okay, the sleeve is in German and the menus are in German, but the soundtrack is a reassuringly English DTS-HD MA one, although of the basic 5.1 variety.

I can understand Hollywood blockbusters, cult horror and film noir titles having more desirable

versions in different territories, but for such a British-themed movie to only be available from Germany (of all places!) is bemusing, to say the least. As one of the review soundbites on the sleeve exclaims, it is 'Eine britische version von *Saturday Night Fever*.' And you don't need a translator to tell you what that means.
Michael McGreevy, via email

Anton van Beek replies: The production costs involved and limited market size mean that many smaller labels (such as Soda Pictures, the UK distributor of *SoulBoy*) find the idea of releasing Blu-ray versions of the majority of their titles financially prohibitive – even films whose essential 'Britishness' would appear to make this country their

main market. Indeed, in this issue we've reviewed a handful of films on DVD that have bypassed Blu-ray here, but are either already available or will be soon elsewhere in Europe. This situation is not going to change this far into the BD format's life – which only makes it more important than ever for UK-based film fans to keep an eye on what is going on in those European countries with larger, more developed disc markets.

Bag yourself a Denon!

HCC readers: let me share something with you. I just bought the best AVR yet – the Denon AVR-X7200WA, upgraded immediately with Auro-3D. I can safely say that it is the most complete AVR I've ever owned in

my life (I've also had AVRs from Pioneer, Yamaha and Onkyo).

The Denon (although lacking THX processing) sounds gorgeous – open and spacious. It has a great Audyssey system, Dolby Atmos is superb and if you hear Auro-3D you'll get an automatic smile on your face (and the update was smooth and efficient).

The Denon was tested in HCC #248 and 'only' got a Best Buy accolade. Come on! It deserves 'Reference status'. If this one only gets a Best Buy, what else is there left in this price category?

Also, Team HCC: please test Auro-3D out. The Denon can play Auro-3D in any way you like, it's very flexible. I am curious to hear what you think of it.

Wim Van den Broucke, via email >

HOME CINEMA

Choice

→ IN THE NEXT ISSUE

New tech for the New Year The best home cinema gear from IFA 2015

Atmos uncovered Which discs rule the roost?

Bargain Ultra HD! Want a 4K TV for less than £1,000? We've got you covered

→ ON TEST

Panasonic TX-50CX802 Ultra HD TV **Marantz AV8802A processor** **Optoma HD91+ LED projector** **Tannoy HTS101 XP sub/sat system** **Acer H6520BD projector** **Yamaha RX-A550 receiver** **PLUS** News, software, opinion, AV rooms and more!

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER

ISSUE
#252 ON SALE
Sep 24

Mark Craven replies. Do you work for Denon? Only joking. The AVR-X7200WA is a stonking AV receiver, capable of Dolby Atmos, Auro-3D (via a paid upgrade) and, shortly, DTS:X, too. So your home audio needs are well covered.

So why no Reference Status badge? Essentially because it's only a nine-channel design (rated at 9 x 150W per channel). Although capable of 11.2-channel processing (and offering 13.2-channel pre-outs) this limits buyers to a 5.2.4 or 7.2.2 Dolby Atmos experience out of the box – you need to add an additional stereo power amp to proceedings to get an 11-channel soundfield. This may sound like nit-picking, but if you consider that most high-end home cinema buyers will already be running a traditional 7.1 speaker array, the Denon will only allow them to add two Atmos ceiling/reflective speakers, rather than the four that gives a better effect.

Onkyo (with its current TX-NR3030) and Yamaha (with

its previous DSP-Z11) have offered AV receivers with 11 amplifier channels. It'd be great to see Denon do the same.

Did Optoma forget my filter?

Hi. My SIM2 HT300E finally gave up so after lots of reading about the Optoma HD151X – then your great review on the projector – my heart was set on this model. I got my new PJ, read the manual to see what does what, and pulled out the dust filter to find no mesh or anything to shield against dust (and moths!) that might get sucked in. It's just a bit of plastic. The manual describes the projector filter as an 'optional' dust filter – after paying £650 I don't get a mesh for the filter? Justin Ball, via email

Mark Craven replies: We've contacted our chums at Optoma and they say you don't need one!

'In Europe we do not need or use the optional dust filters on any of our projectors. The manual is made for all regions, which is



Optoma's HD151X: no dust filter needed...

why it mentions this. The dust filters are only used in Asia because the environment is more dusty and they have issues, particularly in the education environment, of bugs getting into projectors. Classrooms are often more open in Asia than in Europe.

'Optoma projectors use DLP technology, which is dust-sealed and therefore filter-free, unlike LCD projectors.

'So, for normal environments in Europe the dust filter is not required. It is only in extreme environments, such as dusty

Industrial settings, that we would suggest using this additional filter.' ■

CONTACT US...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com

Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.

Win! Great BDs & DVDs up for grabs

Just email your answer to Competitions@homecinemachoice.com to be in with a chance



My Darling Clementine: Limited Edition

This limited edition two-disc Arrow Academy Blu-ray features restorations of two edits of John Ford's classic 1946 Western, plus a host of exclusive extras including

documentaries, radio plays and the 1939 film *Frontier Marshal*. We have three to give away.

Question:

My Darling Clementine is based on the exploits of which legendary gunfighter?

Answer:

- A) Wyatt Earp B) Wild Bill Hickok
C) Bat Masterson

Email your answer with '*Clementine*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



The Knick: The Complete First Season

Out now to buy on DVD and Blu-ray, this award-winning TV series follows the lives of the staff at a New York hospital during the early 1900s. And thanks to HBO

Home Entertainment we've got five copies of the Blu-ray boxset up for grabs.

Question:

Which acclaimed filmmaker directed all ten episodes of *The Knick's* first season?

Answer:

- A) Steven Spielberg B) Steven Soderbergh
C) Steven Seagal

Email your answer with '*The Knick*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



Modern Family: The Complete Sixth Season

The smash-hit US sitcom returns to DVD on September 14 with 24 hilarious new episodes.

To celebrate the release we've got five copies of the DVD to give away courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Question:

Modern Family's Ed O'Neill also starred in which of the following sitcoms?

Answer:

- A) Married... with Children B) Seinfeld
C) Diff'rent Strokes

Email your answer with '*Modern Family*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!

Terms & Conditions

1. Entrants must be aged 18 or over and resident in the United Kingdom. 2. Employees of MyTimeMedia Ltd and companies supplying competition prizes are not eligible to enter. 3. No responsibility will be accepted for delayed, mislaid, lost or damaged entries. 4. Only one entry per household; multiple entries will be discounted. 5. Prizes will be awarded to the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing date. 6. No alternatives, cash or otherwise, will be offered to the winner as prizes. 7. The editor's decision is final. 8. Comp winners' info available on request. 9. The closing date is October 2, 2015.

THE **hi-fi** SHOW *Live* 2015

Now in its third year, with more exhibits than ever, the UK's only high-end audio show continues to gather pace as the 'who's who' of world-class hi-fi plan their debuts



24th-25th OCTOBER

The stunning CE1 standmounts from TAD will be demo'd with the new D1000MkII SACD/DAC/preamp. You'll also hear the awesome CR1MkII loudspeakers in a full TAD Reference system!



Headphone fans will be treated to the great and good (the very good...) in personal listening, including the opportunity to don a pair of the highly anticipated Nighthawks from AudioQuest.



**TICKETS
ON SALE
NOW**

Advance tickets are on sale for the UK's premier high-end audio event – The Hi-Fi Show Live at the Beaumont Estate, Old Windsor on Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th October 2015.

Tickets cost £20 (or £30 for a weekend pass) via www.eventbrite.co.uk or the Hi-Fi News website.

We will also be offering a concessionary £15 day pass for subscribers of *Hi-Fi News* and *Hi-Fi Choice*, details of which will be announced soon. Please return regularly to www.hifinews.co.uk/show for more details.



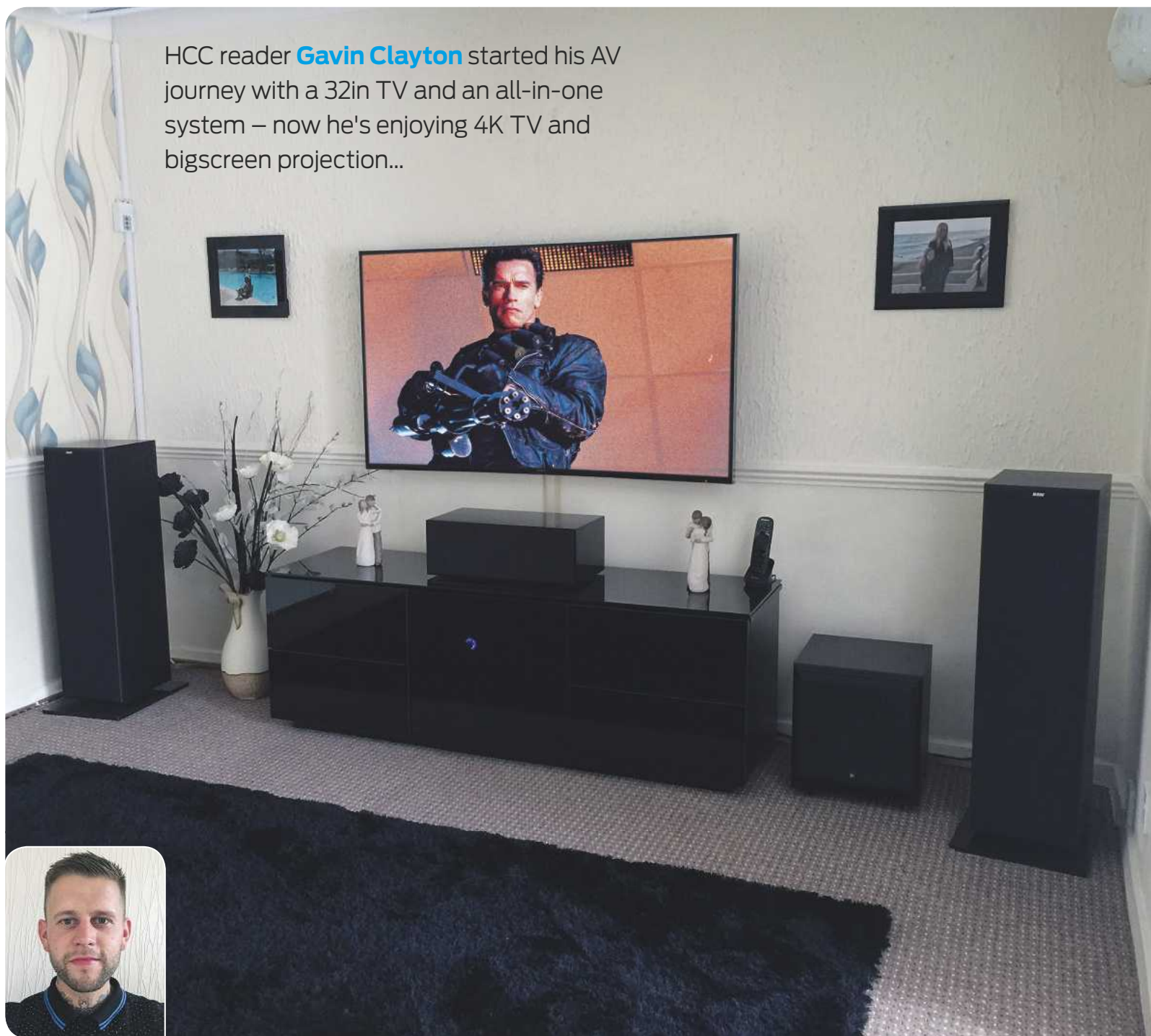
Great headphones deserve great headphone amplifiers and this will be your first chance to audition Trilogy's new 931. A purely analogue single-ended Class A design, the 931 promises to be a real treat for your cans.

This is the first time a Clearaudio Statement turntable has been shown in the UK since the Heathrow *Hi-Fi News* Show of 2006! Since then this reference-class deck has been updated with POM platters, new plinth finishes and a raft of new tonearms. If you want to experience the ultimate in vinyl replay then join us to hear the UK debut of this updated classic!



The huge Windsor 3 Suite will play host to Gamut's imposing new flagship RS9 floorstanders. Weighing in at 185kg, these incredible 1.7m-high, three-way, five-driver loudspeakers will be making their world debut at the Hi-Fi Show Live!

HCC reader **Gavin Clayton** started his AV journey with a 32in TV and an all-in-one system – now he's enjoying 4K TV and bigscreen projection...



Twin-screen king

Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame! Introduce yourself...

Hi, my name is Gavin Clayton and I am 30 years old. I work as a UPV double-glazing fitter.

How long have you been into home cinema – and what was the first setup you had?

When I was 15, my local youth club were

offered a tour of the Bowers and Wilkins factory, which I attended. We were shown around and then taken to the company's in-house cinema, where we were lucky enough to be shown a demo of the car chase/bank robbery scene from *Heat*. From that moment on I have been obsessed with recreating that experience. I started off with

a deep-backed 32in Panasonic TV (which at the time seemed huge) and a standard LG 5.1 all-in-one system. From then I have slowly upgraded piece-by-piece.

What do you currently use?

I have an Onkyo TX-NR717 receiver driving Bowers & Wilkins 603s for front left/right,



Above: Gavin's children are fans of the 110in motorised screen; top right: Optoma's HD50 provides HD and 3D fun; below: Samsung's 55HU8500 curved 4K TV means this system is ready for UHD Blu-ray



B&W 602 speakers occupy the surround channels, but may soon be replaced

602s for surround left/right and a CM Centre S2. The subwoofer is a KEF PSW 1150. I have two displays – a Samsung 55in HU8500 (4K, curved) TV and a 110in motorised screen for my Optoma HD50 projector. Sources are a PlayStation 4 and an Xstreamer Prodigy media player with 1TB hard drive. For control I use a Logitech Touch universal remote. Speaker wire and HDMI cabling are from QED.

What do you love about your system and do you have anything you'd change?

I am loving all of it for the budget we had. I would like to change the projector screen at some point as we went with a cheap

motorised one. I would definitely be looking at a Sapphire screen.

So roughly how much have you spent on it?

Around £7,000 to date.

What's next on your equipment wishlist?

A Dolby Atmos-compatible AVR is high on my wishlist, but to be honest my next upgrade is likely to be the B&W front and rear speakers. I have recently upgraded my centre speaker to the B&W CM series as the 600s are starting to age. The sound difference has blown me away, so I will be going for a full CM speaker setup in the near future.

What's your favourite bit of kit?

It is hard to choose between any of it, but I think the Samsung curved TV just tops the list. The UHD Smart Evolution Kit, which according to Samsung will make it 'future proof', was certainly a selling point. It also packs 4K with great upscaling, has built-in satellite and terrestrial tuners, and the Smart features are great for on-demand TV – attaching a hard drive means I no longer need to use a PVR.

What do other people think of the system?

My partner Jo hates trying to figure out the remote but gives me a lot of support when it comes to purchasing new hardware.

My children absolutely love my obsession. They especially love to watch movies on the projector – or 'big screen' as they like to call it. We get to have our own personal night at the cinema on the weekend. Having the PJ is also really great for having friends and family around when big sports events are on.

What are your demo discs?

Edge of Tomorrow is one of my favourites. Also *Transformers: Dark Of The Moon*, especially the final few chapters. *Gravity* is a great demo for showing off 3D.

What are your favourite Blu-rays?

My top three would have to be *Predator*, *Terminator 2* and *Rise of the Footsoldier*.

You have a 4K TV...

To be honest I wasn't that excited for 4K at the beginning, but after we got the TV home I plugged in the UHD video pack and it won me over. The crisp, clear picture detail is a very big improvement over 1080p. The lack of 4K content is the only downside I can see at the moment. Netflix has the only content I have access to until 4K Blu-ray arrives.

And what about Dolby Atmos/DTS:X?

I have been very excited for both of these as while I was purchasing the Optoma projector I was given a full demo of Dolby Atmos and it has me interested. The above speaker channels definitely make a big difference ■



Above: The front speakers are floorstanding B&W 603s; top right: a PlayStation 4 and Xstreamer Prodigy meet this AV-Holic's movie needs; right: the system is controlled by a Logitech universal remote



SHARE YOUR SYSTEM IN THE MAG!

IF YOU WANT TO BE THE NEXT 'AV-HOLIC' IN HCC, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. The better-quality image we get, the better your room will look. So follow these simple steps:

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch movies in the dark, our

cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.

4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. We'd love a picture of yourself – unless you want to remain anonymous...

6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Email your selection of images to letters@homecinemachoice.com with the subject heading 'AV-Holic'. Provide us with some information about your setup and we'll then be back in touch.

...And blag an AudioQuest Pearl HDMI cable!

The kind people at cable king AudioQuest are giving away a two-metre Pearl HDMI cable to our AV-Holic each month. The Pearl, which retails for £34, uses long-grain copper conductors and a foamed polyethylene insulation for a robust construction. All AudioQuest HDMI cables up to 10 metres meet or exceed the 10.2Gbps maximum data rate for HDMI and are approved High Speed with Ethernet cables.



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

www.hifichoice.co.uk

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE...

to getting the best possible sound
from your hi-fi, whether you're
buying, tuning or tweaking



Fuel your
passion for
sound and make
your music sing
OUT NOW!



[twitter.com@HiFiChoiceMag](https://twitter.com/HiFiChoiceMag)



facebook.com/hifichoice.co.uk

Missed an issue?

Have you missed a copy of *Home Cinema Choice*? You can now order these online or over the phone



Issue No.239



Issue No.240



Issue No.241



Issue No.242



Issue No.243



Issue No.244



Issue No.245



Issue No.246



Issue No.247



Issue No.248



Issue No.249



Issue No.250

Phone: 0844 848 8822

(Phone lines open: Mon-Fri 10am – 4pm)

Order Online:

www.myhobbystore.co.uk/hcc



PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **FAST & FURIOUS 7** Automotive action sequel gets our engine revving with its AV credentials **PITCH PERFECT 2** Musical comedy sings the praises of lossless audio **WILD CARD** Is this Jason Statham thriller worth a gamble on Blu-ray? **THE THIRD MAN** Legendary British noir receives a 4K restoration **ZOMBI HOLOCAUST** Full HD flesh-munching **AND MUCH MORE!**

Dystopian delight?

The Divergent Series: Insurgent 3D
Entertainment One → Region B BD

Does the sequel to last year's *Divergent* see this 'Young Adult' sci-fi franchise step up as a contender for *The Hunger Games*' throne? Find out as we give the 3D Blu-ray a spin over the page...

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

Public toilets are set to get very weird in the future...



More urgent than Divergent

Second instalment in this dystopian sci-fi saga offers more for adults (whether Young or not)

→ THE DIVERGENT SERIES: INSURGENT 3D

With all of the world-building taken care of in last year's slightly creaky *Divergent*, this 'Young Adult' sci-fi sequel can get down to the business of driving the narrative forward while exploring the characters in even greater detail.

The fact that *...Insurgent* ends up being more enjoyable than snore-fests like *The Maze Runner* and the last *Hunger Games* sequel rest predominantly with the cast. Shailene Woodley continues to impress as Tris, imbuing the character with a sense of strength and purpose, while the likes of Kate Winslet and franchise newcomer Naomi Watts provide compelling support. It also doesn't hurt that the film ups the stakes when it comes to action scenes, crafting a series of muscular, edge-of-your-seat set-pieces as its heads into its last act.

Picture: This double-disc release includes separate stereoscopic and 'flat' 2.40:1-framed 1080p presentations of the film.

Converted in post-production, *...Insurgent* still delivers a good-looking 3D experience that boasts convincing separation across the foreground and background, giving the image a hefty sense of depth. And while there isn't too much in the way of negative-parallax effects, the stereoscopic encode creates an appreciable sense of space. Check out the holographic displays and scenes of Tris smashing out of her glass prison during the virtual reality



HCC VERDICT

The Divergent Series: Insurgent 3D
→ EntertainmentOne
→ Region B BD → £25 approx
WE SAY: A superb hi-def release for this surprisingly thrilling and emotive teeny-bopper sci-fi

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

simulations (Chapters 12 to 15) to see just how effective it can be.

Given the technical strengths of the 3D version, it should come as no surprise that the alternate 2D presentation looks very impressive. Some of the darker scenes see a slight drop in shadow detail, but overall it makes for an attractive watch in HD.

Audio: EntertainmentOne is the latest UK distributor to jump on the Dolby Atmos bandwagon with this Blu-ray release. We'll discuss it in depth in a special Atmos roundup next issue.

And don't be put off if you don't have the necessary Atmos kit, as the core Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mix is a blinder. Spacious and powerful, the track delivers a vibrant and convincing soundscape. Once again, it's the VR sims (particularly the first two in Chapters 12 and 13) that provide the best demo sequences, thanks to their energetic use of positional effects and thunderous low-end frequencies.

Extras: The 2D platter is packed with goodies.

These include a chat-track with producers Douglas Wick and Lucy Fisher, five short featurettes and an extensive 'marketing gallery' containing four promo videos, five trailers (one in 3D) and a gallery of poster art.

Best of all though is *Insurgent Unlocked: The Ultimate Behind the Scenes Access*. Running 117 minutes, it offers a detailed look into the production while the film itself plays out in a small window in a bottom corner of the screen. And if you don't fancy watching it all in one sitting, *Insurgent Unlocked...* can also be viewed as seven separate featurettes.

Home: Party Edition

DreamWorks/Twentieth Century Fox
All-region BD → £25 approx



Pop star Rihanna and *The Big Bang Theory*'s Jim Parsons provide the voices of a young girl and a misfit alien who

go on the run together in this middling CG animation that comes across like an inferior version of Disney's *Lilo & Stitch*. While the Blu-ray looks as sharp and colourful as you'd expect, the DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix is surprisingly underwhelming when handling action scenes such as Chapter 14's Eiffel Tower escape. The disc includes plenty of extras, but the vast majority of these are aimed at children and there's very little info about the actual making of the movie.



Child 44

EntertainmentOne → Region B BD
£25 approx



Based on Tom Rob Smith's bestseller about a disgraced MGB agent on the trail of a child killer in Stalin's

Soviet Union, *Child 44* could have been a great cinematic thriller. Unfortunately, the mishandling of the crime story (which is pushed right into the background) and the cast's decision to engage in a battle of silly accents sap this adaptation of any tension. This Blu-ray release copes as well as can be expected with the film's authentic but drab visual style, while the clarity of the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix helps make the mangled Russian accents a little more manageable.



Good Kill

Arrow Films → Region B BD
£20 approx



A smarter, sharper look at the human cost of modern warfare than *American Sniper*, this provocative character

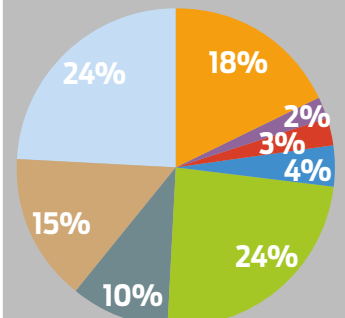
study stars Ethan Hawke as a US Air Force pilot who has been ordered to switch to flying drones and begins to question the morality of what he is doing. Favouring characterisation over action, the film's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is primarily given over to dialogue, but also creates a good sense of ambience for the confined interior of the drone control room. Meanwhile, the AVC 2.40:1 1080p transfer is sharp but gloomy, regardless of the bright Las Vegas sunshine.



WE ASKED...

Which is your favourite *Fast & Furious* film?

■ Part One ■ Part Two
■ Part Three ■ Part Four
■ Part Five ■ Part Six
■ Part Seven ■ None of them



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action



Not quite perfect, but close enough

The eagerly-awaited musical comedy follow-up hits the right notes on Blu-ray

→ PITCH PERFECT 2

The original *Pitch Perfect* was one of 2012's biggest cinematic surprises, balancing its toe-tapping a cappella numbers with plenty of acerbic humour.

While this sequel isn't quite up to the same level, debut director Elizabeth Banks has still crafted an enjoyable mix of bawdy comedy, girl power and gonzo musical numbers. It's just a shame that the same effort that was put into orchestrating the a cappella scenes wasn't put into the script, with its story of the disgraced all-girl group the Barden Bellas entering an international competition feeling more like a collection of (admittedly funny) sketches rather than a cohesive story.

Picture: This glossy sequel makes its bow on Blu-ray with an opulent AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode. The most striking aspect is the oversaturated colour palette, which fills the screen with deep, vibrant primaries and warm fleshtones. Contrast is stable throughout ensuring rich blacks full of shadow detail. There are a few instances of banding, but the encode is otherwise technically sound, with no aliasing, ringing or artefacting.

Audio: While the rest of the film can sound rather front-heavy, the DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix explodes into life whenever the singing starts. Vocal reproduction offers terrific dynamic range, precise separation and accomplished directional effects that help extend the soundstage and envelop the viewer.



Extras: Universal has loaded the *Pitch Perfect 2* Blu-ray with enough bonus features to leave any Barden Bellas groupie singing its praises.

For those interested in how the film was put together, the disc includes eight short behind-the-scenes featurettes, plus a fun and informative commentary by director-producer-actress Elizabeth Banks and producers Paul Brooks and Max Handelman.

Also included are three extended musical numbers; a bonus song; a breakdown of one of the a cappella performances (allowing you to listen to the background vocals, beat box and lead vocals in isolation); nine deleted/extended/alternate scenes; a gag reel; a reel of alternate lines; and a rap about the Green Bay Packers.



HCC VERDICT

Pitch Perfect

→ Universal Pictures

→ All-region BD → £25 approx

WE SAY: This riotous comedy sequel lands on Blu-ray with wonderful picture and sound quality

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Seventh heaven for action fans

The latest *Fast & Furious* maintains the series' pace and burns rubber on Blu-ray



Michelle Rodriguez and Vin Diesel return as loved-up couple Letty and Dom

→ FAST & FURIOUS 7: EXTENDED EDITION

Universal Studios doesn't have a superhero franchise to rival Marvel's *Avengers*, Warner's *Batman* or Fox's *X-Men*. But it doesn't need one, does it? The characters in the long-running *Fast & Furious* series are now so superheroic they will soon need to start donning capes.

In this seventh episode, Dom Toretto (Vin Diesel), Brian O'Conner (Paul Walker) and the rest of the petrolhead crew hit the road once again, ostensibly so they can hunt down a stolen computer programme that will enable them to locate baddie Deckard Shaw (Jason Statham), following his cameo in the last movie). This is pure MacGuffin territory, but it enables a globe-trotting script (Azerbaijan, Abu Dhabi, L.A) packed full of car stunts, fist fights and outrageous set-pieces.

Fears that director James Wan would struggle to fill the boots of the departed Justin Lin are largely unfounded. Wan proves able to make the shift from jump scares (*The Conjuring*) to jumping cars, handling the high-octane lunacy well. Sure, there are a few CG sequences that stand out, but when you have a scene where a Lykan HyperSport is driven *through* the Etihad Towers,

in-camera effects are never going to cut it. Statham, meanwhile, is a superb addition, all menacing stubble and gruff threats, while the introduction of Kurt Russell as an ice-cool secret agent and Nathalie Emmanuel as a computer hacker bode well for the inevitable next instalment.

Hanging over the entire movie is the knowledge that Walker was killed in an unrelated car crash midway through production, causing a year delay, script rewrites and the use of both CGI and his brothers as body doubles to finish the picture. While at times this is obvious, it doesn't hamper the movie's verve or narrative, and the way *Fast & Furious 7* finds reason to close proceedings with a montage of Walker throughout the franchise is both clever and poignant. It might make even the most hard-boiled AV-holic shed a tear...

Picture: *F&F 7* looks race-worthy on Blu-ray, with Universal's 1080p encode of the 2.40:1 cinematography appearing clean, colourful and stacked with detail. This image picks out textures and finery everywhere – Vin Diesel's face appears rugged enough to remove wallpaper; lumps of gravel spit up from the road surface. It's only during some of the dimly-lit sequences that picture clarity takes a hit. Contrast levels are high, but not



'I'm pretty sure one of us was on the wrong side of the road'

DEMO SCREEN...

Fast & Furious 7: Extended Edition – Etihad Towers jump

Time code: 079.03 – 081.48



Better get moving: The plan to make off with a Lykan HyperSport from the penthouse of one of the Etihad Towers goes awry when Deckard Shaw (Jason Statham) crashes the party.



'Dom... cars don't fly!': With no obvious way out, Toretto (Vin Diesel) opts to leave via the window, just as Shaw fires a rocket-propelled grenade accompanied by plenty of LFE.



Let's do it again: Having traversed the mid-air gap between the first and second tower, brake failure leaves our heroes with little choice but to repeat the trick and jump across to the third...



Ooops: ...where their pace is slowed by a rather priceless-looking collection of terracotta warriors. Can they escape from the car before it goes out yet another window?

uncomfortably so, and rich colour saturation highlights the lurid paintwork of some of the exotic cars. A close look reveals no obvious signs of digital smoothing or sharpening.

Audio: This DTS-HD 7.1 audio mix is mostly about as subtle as a double-decker bus. It hits hard and loud, often drowning out the score with snarling engines and weapons fire. Bass is a constant menace, adding slam to everything from Dwayne Johnson's fists to crashing ambulances, and sonic steering is quick and effective – the sound engineers work hard to put you in the midst of the showstopping set-pieces. However, it does know when to rein itself in – the Etihad Towers jump (see above) strips the soundmix down to just the whistling wind...

Extras: There's quite a decent selection here that fans will like to dip into. Heading up the list are four deleted scenes – these serve to fill in some character backstory hanging over from the previous

movie, and it's easy to see why they were cut for a tighter edit. Speaking of edits – this release includes both theatrical and extended editions. Don't expect Peter Jackson-style shenanigans, though, as the latter runs only about two minutes longer.

The rest of the extras (barring a music video) focus on the film's production. The pick of these is *Talking Fast*, a 30-minute interactive feature hosted by James Wan. Wan is great value – enthusiastic and informative, and this serves as a good alternative to a director's commentary. Other, shorter, featurettes look at key action scenes (the mountain top chase, the HyperSport jump, four fight sequences), the cars, the Race Wars location, the new Universal theme park ride and how the film was developed following the runaway success of *F&F 6*.



The Race Wars location from the very first movie is revisited



HCC VERDICT

Fast & Furious 7: Extended Edition

→ Universal Pictures

→ All-region BD → £25 approx

WE SAY: Another hit for the *F&F* team on a Blu-ray disc that delivers on all counts

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

ARCADE ACTION

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

Batman: Arkham Knight

Warner Bros. Interactive → Xbox One/PS4/PC → £50 approx



The Caped Crusader faces his toughest challenge to date as he takes on the combined might of both Scarecrow and the mysterious Arkham Knight in this concluding instalment in Rocksteady's acclaimed trilogy of Batman videogames.



Far removed from the cramped confines of *...Arkham Asylum* and a further leap on from the open world of *...Arkham City*, this finale gives players the franchise's biggest environment yet to explore. However, while it may be larger, Gotham City has never felt so busy, with every street teeming with criminal gangs and side quests. Moving around the map has been made easier with the introduction of the Batmobile, which also provides new solutions to the puzzles that regularly stand in your way. It's a surprisingly effective and well-judged addition to the game that only stumbles when the developer decides to add a repetitive stealth element to this part of the game.

Elsewhere it's pretty much business as usual – only bigger and better. The puzzles are tougher, the combat is even more refined and the jump to next-gen consoles ensures the title looks absolutely incredible. Sadly, the PC port is reported to be another story, suffering from gameplay and performance problems that are frantically being fixed by patches.



Godzilla

Namco Bandai → PS4/PS3 → £50 approx



Being huge fans of Godzilla, the idea of taking control of Japan's King of the Monsters and rampaging through cities while doing battle with some of his most iconic enemies sounded like videogame nirvana. However, after sitting down with Namco Bandai's new *Godzilla* game for a few hours, there was only



one thing on our mind: how had the developer got everything so disastrously wrong?

If there's one thing that a *Godzilla* game shouldn't be, it's dull. But that's the main feeling that this game's central 'God of Destruction' mode

engenders as you are repeatedly tasked with stomping your way through cities in order to destroy a series of power generators. Trust us, there's nothing exciting about bashing a building with your tail over and over again. Now, things do get a little more interesting when other giant kaiju turn up to do battle, but that's mainly due to the unresponsive controls and buggy combat replacing the usual feeling of boredom with one of teeth-grinding frustration. Add to that the blocky graphics and murky textures and you have a gaming disaster of Godzilla-like proportions.



X-Men: Days of Future Past – The Rogue Cut

Twentieth Century Fox → Region A/B BD
£25 approx



The centrepiece of this latest hi-def outing for the seventh *X-Men* film is a new 149-minute re-edit that introduces two entirely new scenes alongside a host of smaller alterations and additions. As alternate cuts go, it's hardly revelatory, but X-fans will no doubt find it worth a look. This double-disc Blu-ray also includes the original theatrical cut, plus some impressive new extras including two chat-tracks, an hour-long *Making of...* documentary, and a roundtable chat with the cast and director.



The Knick: The Complete First Season

HBO Home Entertainment
Region B BD → £45 approx



If Steven Soderbergh has truly retired from directing feature films then cinema's loss is television's gain. This hypnotic 10-part period drama benefits hugely from his fly-on-the-wall style as it follows the staff at New York's Knickerbocker Hospital, bringing an authenticity to stories that flit between pioneering (and gory) surgical procedures, socio-economic issues and outright melodrama. Not only does *The Knick* look great on BD, it also sounds superb too, demonstrating excellent tonality in its handling of Cliff Martinez's electronic score.



The Decline of Western Civilisation Collection

Second Sight → Region B BD
£40 approx



This mammoth four-disc set brings together Penelope Spheeris's trio of acclaimed rockumentaries alongside a host of extras. While *...Part II's* focus on 'hair metal' feels rather disconnected from the more gritty punk-based outings that surround it, taken together the films paint a fascinating portrait of the L.A. music scene throughout the 1980s. In addition to remastered 1080p encodes, the set offers commentaries, extended interviews, additional performances and more.



'I say old chap, this cemetery is so popular that people are simply dying to get in...'



Third time lucky for The Third Man

A brand-new 4K restoration makes this latest Blu-ray of the classic noir worth investigating

→ THE THIRD MAN

Carol Reed's celebrated 1949 British noir stars Joseph Cotten as Holly Martins, a pulp novelist who accepts a job offer in post-war Vienna from childhood friend Harry Lime (Orson Welles) – only to learn on his arrival that Lime has been killed in a traffic accident. Unconvinced by the story he's told by the local military police, Martins teams up with Lime's girlfriend Anna (Alida Vali) in an attempt to uncover the identity of the mysterious 'third man' seen at the site of the accident and find out what really happened to his old chum.

Based on a script by Graham Greene, *The Third Man* is a masterful (and surprisingly wry) thriller that eschews the more straightforward notion of goodies and baddies in favour of a complex moral minefield full of corrupt officials and black marketeers. And at the heart of it all stands Orson Welles as the cherub-faced Harry Lime, one of the actor's most memorable and celebrated creations, despite his relatively brief screen time.

But Welles is merely the icing on the top of this beautifully constructed cinematic confection. Even without his performance *The Third Man* would still be a remarkable film thanks to Carol Reed's assured direction, Graham Greene's sly script, Robert Krasker's expressionist cinematography and Anton Karas's unforgettable zither score.

Picture: *The Third Man* has an interesting history on Blu-ray, having been released first as part of The Criterion Collection in the US in 2008, before the UK



received its own inferior StudioCanal Collection Blu-ray two years later (a Lionsgate-distributed US version of this release also replaced the Criterion disc).

This second StudioCanal UK release is thankfully a significant step up in quality, with the new 4K restoration (explored in depth in one of the platter's new extras) delivering a more stable and detailed 1.37:1-framed 1080p transfer. Contrast levels look far more accurate, leading to vastly improved shadow delineation, while native film grain is perfectly resolved.

Audio: *The Third Man*'s DTS-HD Master Audio dual-mono soundtrack does everything you could hope for given the age of the source material. There's no pop, crackles or other distortion, dialogue is clear and natural, and that zither score sounds sublime.

Extras: This new release carries over the vast majority of extras from StudioCanal's original Blu-ray. These include a commentary; 90-minute documentary; a live performance of the main zither theme; an interactive map of Vienna with links to 14 location videos; an episode of the 1951 radio production *The Lives of Harry Lime* written and performed by Welles; audio interviews with Joseph Cotten and Graham Greene; and the alternate opening narration.

New to this release are a 20-minute look at the restoration of the film; a 56-minute doc about Greene and a 16-minute featurette in which the likes of Martin Scorsese, John Sayles and Ben Wheatley discuss the impact *The Third Man* had on them.



Alida Vali also stars in Euro horror classic *Eyes Without a Face* (reviewed on p105)



HCC VERDICT

The Third Man

→ StudioCanal → All-region BD
→ £23 Approx

WE SAY: It's taken several attempts, but we finally have a definitive hi-def version of Carol Reed's classic thriller

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Has Statham played his cards right?

Action star gambles on something a little meatier than usual in this Vegas-set thriller

→ WILD CARD: EXTENDED EDITION

Jason Statham tries his hand at some 'Capital-A' acting playing Nick Wild, a Las Vegas bodyguard and recovering gambling addict who sets out to help an old girlfriend (Dominik Garcia-Lorido) after she's assaulted by sadistic mobster (Milo Ventimiglia).

If that sounds like a tale with all of the usual trappings of a typical Statham actioner, it's worth noting that it's based on William 'The Princess Bride' Goldman's 1985 novel *Heat* (previously adapted for the big screen in '86, starring Burt Reynolds). So, while the star gets a couple of opportunities to beat people up, *Wild Card* is actually a rather more thoughtful and offbeat piece of cinema than his fans may be expecting.

As happy as we are to see Statham doing something a little different (and doing it rather well), that doesn't automatically make *Wild Card* a cracking piece of cinema. This is a film too happy to wallow in familiar Vegas clichés, and it suffers from an uneven narrative structure not helped by a lengthy opening sequence that has literally no bearing whatsoever on anything that follows. So, while it was clearly worth the gamble from Statham's point of view, *Wild Card* ultimately ends up as an interesting failure.

Picture: Despite being shot using Red Epic digital cameras, director Simon West and cinematographer Shelly Johnson have attempted to give *Wild Card* a '70s aesthetic. This means that the Blu-ray's 2.40:1 Full HD encode is not



only thick with digital grain, but also features a muted colour palette and high contrast style that blows out highlights while crushing blacks right down. This has the effect of giving medium and long shots a slightly soft appearance, although close-ups still retain plenty of fine detail.

Audio: *Wild Card* features an immersive DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 track that offers a satisfying blend of location ambience and bone-crunching impacts. The dialogue and score are both well rendered and balanced naturally in the mix.

Extras: This Blu-ray can only muster up a trio of promo featurettes. The lack of the director's commentary from the US release is disappointing, but is presumably due to the US disc hosting the 92-minute theatrical cut of the film, while this UK release boasts a longer 103-minute version.



HCC VERDICT

Wild Card: Extended Edition

→ Lionsgate → Region B BD

→ £25 approx

WE SAY: A wildly uneven, but not unenjoyable, outing for Statham given reasonable treatment on Blu-ray

Movie ★★☆☆☆

Picture ★★☆☆☆

Audio ★★☆☆☆

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★☆☆☆

The Town That Dreaded Sundown

1976

Eureka! Classics → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £23 approx



A precursor to true crime flicks like David Fincher's *Zodiac*, this 1976 horror dramatises the exploits of the 'Phantom Killer', an unidentified serial killer who terrorised the small town of Texarkana in 1946. The resulting mix of slasher scares and quasi-documentary storytelling results in a unique and at times unsettling slice of indie cinema. This timely hi-def release boasts a good-looking 2.35:1 1080p encode and plenty of extras – the best of which is a fascinating chat-track with case historian Jim Presley discussing the real crimes.



The Town That Dreaded Sundown

2014

Metrodome → R2 DVD £15 approx



Directed by *American Horror Story* alumni Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, this slick slasher shares a similarly smart and playful approach to the genre. Equal parts sequel, remake and reboot, this updated *Town...* is both a chilling piece of stalk 'n' slash terror and a self-referential homage to the original that manages to rival *Scream* in the 'meta' stakes. Sadly, despite being released on BD in the US, here in the UK horror-hedz have to make do with this DVD, which provides decent anamorphic 2.35:1 imagery, bold DD 5.1 sonics, and eight cast and crew interviews.



Everly

Entertainment One → Region B BD £25 approx



Wrong Turn 2 director Joe Lynch goes slightly more upmarket (only slightly, mind you) with this action flick about

a prostitute trapped in her apartment and under attack from an army of hired killers. While *Everly* aims for the same sort of trigger-happy anarchy as 2007's *Shoot 'Em Up*, it's ultimately too superficial and repetitive to be regarded as anything more than a gimmicky exploitation flick. On a more positive note, this Blu-ray is graced by a thrillingly aggressive DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack that makes amends for some rather flat 1080p visuals. Extras include two commentaries and six interviews.



Into the Grizzly Maze

Signature Entertainment → R2 DVD £13 approx



Thomas Jane, James Marsden, Billy Bob Thornton and Piper Perabo bring some extra star power to this fun

revenge-of-nature flick about a killer bear. Denied a hi-def release here in the UK, this barebones DVD release boasts an attractive anamorphic 1.85:1 transfer that does its best with the lush location footage, accompanied by a lively DD 5.1 track that adds plenty of impact to the ursine attacks. Note that if you really want to own *Into the Grizzly Maze* in HD, it was released on an English-friendly Blu-ray in Germany early last year under the original title *Red Machine*.





HARPENDEN • EDGWARE • BECKENHAM



3 times award winner
HOME CINEMA CHOICE
"Best Multiroom Installation"



THE BEST HOME CINEMA CHOICE

With 3 showrooms and 7 demonstration rooms, featuring all the latest systems and award winning separates from the world's leading manufacturers, we promise every customer the finest entertainment experience. Whatever your budget, whether you simply want a new radio or a complete Home Entertainment installation, we're here to help.

**HIFI • HOME CINEMA • MULTIROOM AUDIO • HOME AUTOMATION
LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS • A/V DESIGN & CONSULTANCY**

Musical Images Showrooms Opening times 9.30am - 5.30am. Monday - Saturday

82 High Street, Harpenden

Hertfordshire AL5 2SP

Tel: 01582 764246 **NEW SHOWROOM**

harpenden@musicalimages.co.uk

173 Station Road, Edgware

Middlesex HA8 7JX

Tel: 020 8952 5535

edgware@musicalimages.co.uk

126 High Street, Beckenham

Kent BR3 1EB

Tel: 020 8663 3777

beckenham@musicalimages.co.uk

www.musical-images.co.uk

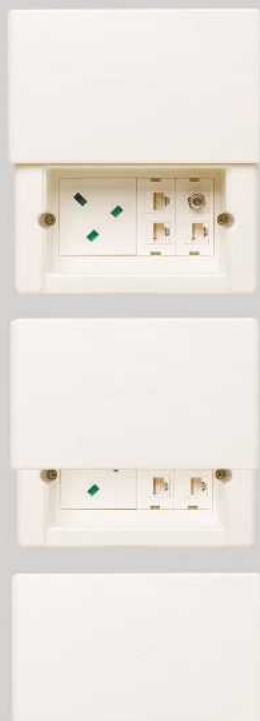
musical images

@musical_images

Audio Visual Lifestyle Ltd trading as Musical Images. Finance options available, subject to status. E&OE

syncbox™

The most advanced tv and power socket
in the world.



www.sync+box.com



Starscape

Home Cinema Star Ceiling Specialists



Photo courtesy of UK Home Cinema

Introduces the

Infinity ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Fibre Optic Star Ceiling System

Lightweight panel based system enables super-fast installation even in basements with solid ceilings. Using our magnetic fixing system with lightweight resilient channel and optical joints, Infinity installs in hours rather than days.

100 twinkling stars (in four different diameters) per square metre, set against a black or blue flocked background makes the Infinity Star Ceiling system the very best in the world. Energy efficient LED light sources for classic twinkling or colour changing effects. DMX models available for integration with home automation.

For professional installation give your local AV specialist a call. Or, if you need help in planning your project contact Peter or John the Starscape directors who will be happy to help.

E: info@starscape.co.uk (01289) 332900 www.starscape.co.uk



An accident waiting to happen...



Monumental Westerns

This rootin' tootin' Blu-ray offers up a double-dose of Wyatt Earp



Cesar Romero (left) as Doc Holliday [sic] and Randolph Scott (right) as Wyatt Earp in 1939's *Frontier Marshal*



→ **MY DARLING CLEMENTINE: LIMITED EDITION**

Former lawman Wyatt Earp (Henry Fonda) takes up the mantle of sheriff in the town of Tombstone in an effort to bring his youngest brother's killers to justice. Along the way he strikes up an unlikely friendship with Doc Holliday (Victor Mature), the gambler who runs the town, and falls in love with Clementine (Cathy Downs), one of Doc's former girlfriends who has come looking for him.

While John Ford's 1946 film may not be the most historically accurate version of the Wyatt Earp story you'll ever see, it is by far the most enjoyable. Most other filmmakers focus almost entirely on the build up to the shootout at the O.K. Corral to the exclusion of all else, but Ford almost seems to forget about the Clantons until the final showdown, giving his movie over to Earp's relationships with Holliday and Clementine. In this way, Ford gives us a rich, sweet and witty film that manages to delight and surprise fans of the genre while also serving as the perfect introduction for those who have resisted the lure of the Wild West until now.

Picture: Created from a 4K scan of a 35mm nitrate composite fine grain element, John Ford's classic Western rides on to Blu-ray with a stunning AVC 1.37:1 Full HD encode that belies the fact that the film will

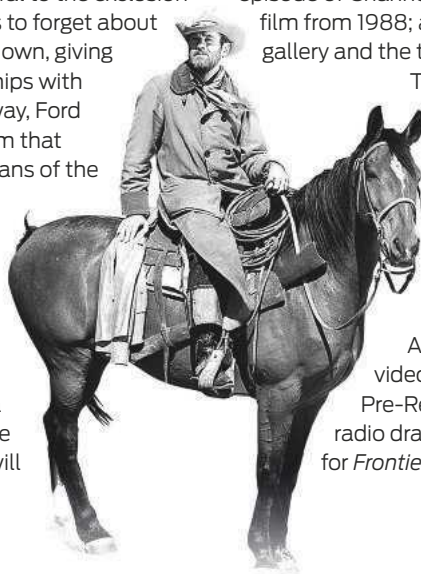
be celebrating its 70th birthday next year. Clarity and definition both impress given the age of the material, and while there are some minor fluctuations in contrast levels, on the whole image stability is very good and film grain is finely resolved.

Audio: The LPCM mono mix sounds perfectly fine. Dialogue and music both show reasonable range and – as with the imagery – the painstaking clean-up job has left it free from background hiss and other age-related imperfections.

Extras: Alongside the original 97-minute cut of the movie, this Limited Edition's first platter also houses an audio commentary by author Scott Eyman and Wyatt Earp III; an hour-long documentary about John Ford's bond with Monument Valley; a 63-minute episode of Channel 4's *Movie Masterclass* about the film from 1988; an 18-minute visual essay; a stills gallery and the trailer.

The second disc not only includes a 103-minute reconstruction of the Pre-Release version of *My Darling Clementine*, but also a restored version of the 1939 Wyatt Earp film *Frontier Marshal*, which covers similar territory, albeit in an even more romanticised manner.

Also included are a 42-minute video examining the differences in the Pre-Release version, two Wyatt Earp radio dramas and a stills gallery and trailer for *Frontier Marshal*.



HCC VERDICT

My Darling Clementine: Limited Edition

→ Arrow Academy → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25 approx

WE SAY: A must-own Blu-ray for fans of John Ford's classic Western

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Suite Française

EntertainmentOne → Region B BD
£25 approx



Based on the best-selling book by Irène Némirovsky, *Suite Française* stars Michelle Williams as a young

woman, living with her domineering mother-in-law in Nazi-occupied France, who starts to fall in love with the German commander billeted to her house. While the Merchant Ivory-esque approach taken to this screen adaptation robs the story of real grit and drama, it does ensure that the film looks handsome – something that is particularly evident courtesy of the pristine 2.40:1 Full HD transfer featured on this Blu-ray release. Extras are limited to five perfunctory *Making of...* videos.



The Saboteurs

Arrow Films → Region B BD
£30 approx



Originally titled *Kampen om tungtvannet* (Heavy Water War), this thrilling Norwegian-Danish-British six-episode TV

miniseries tells the story of the German nuclear weapons program during WWII and the attempts made to stop it. While this single-disc Blu-ray can't muster up any extras, the attractive 1.78:1-framed 1080i50 imagery copes especially well with the show's colour palette, which favours muted tones with the occasional rich bold colour (such as Anna Friel's lipstick). The show's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes impress equally with their handling of dialogue and atmospheric effects.



White God

Metrodome → R2 DVD
£15 approx



Remember Disney's 1963 live-action hit *The Incredible Journey*? Well, this Hungarian political allegory is a bit

like that, only instead of three pets trying to find their way home through 250 miles of Canadian wilderness, we get one dog whose journey home to his teenage owner finds him being abused so badly that he ends up leading a canine uprising against all humanity... While the film itself is a lot of fun, this UK DVD release takes the shine off it thanks to its muddy-looking transfer. Those who want to see how crisp the dog should look would do well to import the Region A-locked US Blu-ray instead.



Man with a Movie Camera

BFI → Region B BD
£20 approx



Having been voted 'the greatest documentary of all time' in a poll of film critics last year, the arrival of Dziga Vertov's

technically groundbreaking 1929 film about city life in the Soviet Union should be cause for unbridled celebration among movie geeks. Sadly, the BFI was unable to licence the new restoration recently released on BD in the US and, while still very good, there's no denying that its own 2K scan suffers in comparison. On the plus side, it does include an LPCM stereo version of the Michael Nyman score, plus three more of Vertov's films.



Face-to-face with a horror legend

Blu-ray release of Georges Franju's haunting masterpiece is a real treat for the eyes

→ EYES WITHOUT A FACE

Following a car crash that leaves his daughter Christiane (Edith Scob) facially disfigured, obsessive plastic surgeon Dr. Genessier (Pierre Brasseur) gets his assistant Louise (Alida Valli) to lure unwitting young women to his secluded chateau in order to use them as a source of skin grafts.

Released in 1960, French filmmaker George Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (aka *Les yeux sans visage*) is a spellbinding piece of pulp horror; a masterpiece of cinematic chills with poetic visuals that transcend the boundaries of language. Its profound influence can still be felt throughout the genre. Disturbing, hypnotic, grisly and heartbreaking, *Eyes Without a Face* is pure cinematic excellence. Not seen it? You should.

Picture: Seemingly sourced from the same hi-def master that served as the basis for Gaumont's All-region French Blu-ray (2010) and Criterion's Region A-locked US release (2013), the BFI's 1080p presentation of *Eyes Without a Face* looks superb.

Blacks are deep, whites are crisp and there's a vast range of grey shades in between the two. Detailing is immaculate, giving the image an added sense of depth and clarity. Meanwhile, native film grain is present and well resolved. All of which is a long-winded way of saying that this AVC-encoded 1.66:1 Full HD transfer never puts a foot wrong.

Audio: The LPCM 2.0 dual-mono soundtrack is particularly strong for a film of this vintage. Every line of dialogue sounds completely natural in tone, and composer Maurice Jarre's score has probably never sounded quite so lush and well-rounded.



'Got no human grace, your eyes without a face...'

Extras: The supplementary features get under way with a new audio commentary from film critic and genre expert Tim Lucas, who brings the same level of knowledge and insight to Franju's film as he regularly does to Arrow Video's Mario Bava releases.

Monsieur et Madame Curie (14 minutes) and *La Première Nuit* (20 minutes) are shorts by Franju, the first a biographical portrait of the famous scientists, the second a surrealist tale of a young rich boy searching the Paris Metro for a mysterious girl he glimpsed. Both are presented in HD.

Les fleurs malades de Georges Franju (Georges Franju's *Evil Flowers*) offers a 46-minute look at the filmmaker's career through interviews with several of his friends and colleagues. There's also a new 17-minute interview with actress Edith Scob.

The Blu-ray also comes with a 34-page booklet containing new and archival writing about the Franju films and composer Maurice Jarre.



HCC VERDICT

Eyes Without a Face

→ BFI → Region B BD &

R2 DVD → £20 approx

WE SAY: A stunning high-definition package for Georges Franju's unforgettable horror classic

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Zombies! Cannibals! Mad scientists!

Italian splatter classic throws in a little bit of everything – except a coherent story

→ ZOMBI HOLOCAUST

A case a cannibalism in a New York hospital leads to a group of investigators coming face-to-face with flesh-eating natives, ghastly ghouls and a mad scientist in this 1980 horror. A mash-up of two of the most popular strains of Italian horror cinema at the time (zombies and cannibals), *Zombi Holocaust* (aka *Doctor Butcher, M.D.*) is unquestionably a weak film. However, in delivering such a delirious mix of laughable dialogue, terrible acting and unconvincing gore, it's also a lot more fun than modern genre trash like *Cockneys vs. Zombies* or *Ouija*.

Picture: In a first for the label, 88 Films has produced its own HD master. Funded through a successful crowdfunding campaign, it's based on a new scan of the original camera negative, with additional restoration work (grading, stabilisation, etc) undertaken at Pinewood Studios. Unfortunately, this hasn't stretched as far as a complete clean-up (which was no doubt financially prohibitive), so the Blu-ray's 1.85:1-framed Full HD transfer still suffers from speckles, blotches and other print damage.

It's also exceptionally grainy, but this is an unavoidable by-product of the filmmakers' decision to shoot *Zombi Holocaust* at 1.85:1 in two-perf Techniscope. While this saves money by only using half as much film stock as you would otherwise, it also results in an aggressively grainy image when projected at full size. Still, as far as we're concerned, 88 Films deserves a pat on the back for resisting the



'As far as garden ornaments go, I prefer a traditional gnome'



temptation to try and play this down with the aid of any noise reduction tools.

Audio: Viewers get to choose between DTS-HD MA mono

versions of the Italian and English soundtracks. Despite the inherent sync issues (the downside of recording the dialogue in post), the two tracks feature reasonable dynamics, pleasing tonal range and are devoid of audio dropout or distortions.

Extras: The Blu-ray boasts a 48-minute Q&A with actor Ian McCulloch, a deleted scene, the trailer, and a 16-page booklet containing another interview with McCulloch. However, the undisputed highlight is *Eaten Alive*, a fascinating 85-minute doc about the history of the Italian cannibal movie genre.

HCC VERDICT

Zombi Holocaust

→ 88 Films → Region B BD

→ £17 approx

WE SAY: An impressive disc that arguably treats this horror mash-up with more respect than it deserves

Movie ★★☆☆☆

Picture ★★☆☆☆

Audio ★★☆☆☆

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★☆☆☆

Riki-Oh: The Story of Ricky

Mediumrare Entertainment
Region B BD → £15 approx



This gleefully silly mix of martial arts and over-the-top gore cuts a surprisingly good figure on Mediumrare's UK Blu-ray. While the 2011 US release was an upconvert, this outing is based

on a new restoration and represents a step forward in image quality. While minor noise reduction and sharpening have been employed, on the whole the 1.78:1 Full HD image is crisp, colourful and detailed. The Cantonese and English soundtracks are both only presented in lossy Dolby Digital 5.1 and mono incarnations. A commentary, interview and Wushu demo have been ported over from the old R2 DVD.



Anthropophagus

88 Films → Region B BD
£20 approx



A mainstay of the 'Video Nasties' list in the UK, Joe D'Amato's 1981 shocker has now been passed uncut by

the BBFC. Unfortunately, like many of the other films from that list, this tale of a demented cannibal preying on tourists on a Greek island is pretty boring and offers little that can't be found in other, better fright flicks. While *Anthropophagus* is a bit of a duffer, 88 Films' Blu-ray also includes *42nd Street Memories*, a superb 82-minute doc about the rise and fall of New York's notorious grindhouse cinema district. This alone will be enough to make the Blu-ray a must-own for many cult film fans.



X-Ray

88 Films → Region B BD
£13 approx



Playboy cover star Barbi Benton stars in this 1981 slasher directed by future *Expendables* producer Boaz Davidson.

While the plot about a young woman who becomes the target for a deranged killer when she goes to hospital for a check-up seems like standard slasher fare, there's also a dream-like oddness to *X-Ray* (aka *Hospital Massacre*) that lifts it above more run-of-the-mill efforts. In addition to a better-than-expected 1.78:1 1080p encode and clear DTS-HD MA dual-mono audio, the BD also includes a lively chat track by two genre experts, plus interviews with the director and cinematographer.



SAMSUNG
SUHD TV^{4K}

UE55JS9000 • 55" CURVED 4K UHD TV

Welcome to a new world of picture quality. The revolutionary S9000 SUHD TV doesn't just raise the bar, it changes the game. This is a new benchmark for design with stunning looks from whatever angle you look at it and picture quality previously only seen in professional editing suites. It's a new world of colour, brightness and contrast, immersed in a sleek and elegant package.

55 **NEW** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY** Also Available **48 65**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

FOR ALL THE LATEST TV PROMOTIONS AND PRICES VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM

NEW

SONY **4K**

KD-55X8509C • 55" 4K UHD TV

Experience 4K by Sony and there's no looking back. Bring all your favourite TV entertainment to life with fine detail and exquisite colour. Effortlessly explore apps, games and the fast-growing choice of broadcast and internet 4K content that's coming your way.

NEW

Also Available **65 75** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY** Also Available X83C Series 43 & 49 • 4K UHD TV **55**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

SONY

KD-55X9005C (ULTRA SLIM) 55" 4K ULTRA HD WITH ANDROID TV

At just 4.9mm thin the X90 is truly 'like no other', it's the world's slimmest LED TV. The new design allows flush wall mounting, making the TV appear to 'float', combine this with Sony's unique picture technologies and you have a truly breath taking viewing experience. The X90 includes the new Android platform, you will get all the personalisation, intelligence and entertainment of your smartphone, on the big screen. Streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon will be available, both offer a variety of 4K programs so you can experience your Sony 4K TV at its best.

NEW **55** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY** **4K** Also Available **65**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

NEW **40**

PANASONIC • TX-40CX680 • 40" 4K UHD TV

With its 3840 x 2160 resolution, this 4K Ultra HD TV makes pictures look so detailed and pristine that you feel like you're looking at the real world through a window rather than watching TV. Especially when features like high brightness/high colour space panels and the powerful Quad Core Pro Engine are on hand to tease out every last tiny detail 4K has to offer.

NEW

Also Available **32 40 48** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

NEW **50**

PANASONIC • TX-50CX802 • 50" 4K UHD TV

The new Panasonic CX802 4K LED TV series combines excellent 4K picture quality with versatile networking features and innovative functions in a stylish design. Thanks to Firefox, "my Home Screen" will be renewed, as a single gateway to all the broadcasting channels, apps and connected devices.

NEW

Also Available **40 55 65** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

NEW **55**

SAMSUNG • UE55JU7000 • 4K UHD TV

Representing the next generation of superior flat screen UHD, the U7000 offers a dramatically enhanced viewing experience. Pictures are brighter and contrast is deeper with better blacks and UHD offering four times more detail than Full HD. Brighter, richer colours, and the versatility of Smart Hub join forces to create a TV that can fulfil all of your expectations.

NEW

Also Available **40 48 65 75 85** **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**

Ask in-store for the latest promotion

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

£999 OR LESS

OPTOMA • HD50 • DLP PROJECTOR

Created for movie-lovers, the new HD50 brings digital cinema quality images into the comfort of your home.

4K **£5849 OR LESS**

SONY • VPL-VW300ES • 4K SXRD PROJECTOR

Bring the truly cinematic quality of 4K to your own home with the Sony VPL-VW300ES Home Cinema projector.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARD 2014 **£2799 OR LESS** **NEW**

SONY VPL-HW55ES SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for cinematic experience

SELECT

Sign up today for our free digital magazine www.ssav.com/select

Issue 1

SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 23/09/2015. E&OE

click & collect
NOW AVAILABLE

www.ssav.com

SEVENoaks
SOUND & VISION



£995
OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ UDP411 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

With more than ten years of digital video experience, not to mention global recognition of its efforts, Arcam is proud to announce the arrival of its newest disc player, the UDP411.

Also Available: NAD T 567



£550
OR LESS

MARANTZ • UD7007 • UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER

Enjoy exceptional sound and picture quality from many formats including SACD, DVD-Audio, 3D Blu-ray and your home network.

Also Available: DENON DBT-3313UD



NEW
£129
OR LESS

PANASONIC • DMP-BDT370 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

New top of the range model featuring 4K upscaling along with playback for 4K JPEG photos, 2D-3D conversion and advanced smart functionality.

Also Available: PANASONIC DMP-BDT460 & DMP-BDT700



£1199
OR LESS

PIONEER • BDP-LX88 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

New universal disc player compatible with SACD and DVD-Audio discs plus lossless high-res support up to 192 kHz/24 bit resolution.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX58



NEW
£95
OR LESS

SONY • BDP-S5500 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

The Sony BDP-S5500 3D Blu-ray Player with 4K upscaling and powerful smart features - it will be the centre piece of your home entertainment system.

Also Available: SONY BDP-S6500 & BDP-S7200



£550
OR LESS

YAMAHA • BD-A1040 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Universal player with top-class audio performance, Miracast™ compatibility and advanced network functions such as WiFi built in and Bluetooth® built in.

Also Available: YAMAHA BD-S677



£2999
OR LESS

***When you trade-in any home theatre product.
(Price without trade-in £3999)**

ARCAM • FMJ AVR750 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver combines 4K "Ultra HD" upscaling and 3D video capability with Arcam's legendary sound quality.

Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR450



NEW
£549
OR LESS



ONKYO • TX-NR646 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network AV receiver - the first in its class to feature the revolutionary DTS:X™ and Dolby Atmos®

Also Available: ONKYO TX-RZ800



NEW
£499
OR LESS



PIONEER • VSX-930 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network receiver with Dolby Atmos, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Hi-Res audio playback.

Also Available: PIONEER SC-LX58 & SC-LX88



NEW
£499
OR LESS

SONY • STR-DN1060 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver with Bluetooth and NFC compatibility, for instant wireless playback from any compatible device.

Also Available: SONY STR-DN1050



NEW
£1099
OR LESS



DENON • AVR-X4200W • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel full 4K Ultra HD network AV receiver with Dolby Atmos, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, Bluetooth and Spotify Connect.

Also Available: DENON AVR-X2200W & AVR-X3200W



NEW
£599
OR LESS

YAMAHA • RX-V679 • AV RECEIVER

7.2-channel network AV receiver featuring Wi-Fi and Bluetooth built-in and 4K Ultra HD compatible HDMI with HDCP2.2.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V379 & RX-A3050



NEW
£999
OR LESS

B&W • ASW10CM S2 • SUBWOOFER

A versatile and powerful subwoofer featuring a 10" Kevlar driver controlled by a highly efficient 500W audiophile Class D amplifier.

REL • T5i SUBWOOFER

New compact active subwoofer featuring a down firing, high quality, AlloyFibre™ composite driver which eliminates the need for a grille and produces maximum coupling with the floor.



NEW
£499
OR LESS

REL • S2 SUBWOOFER

Fast, tuneful, fun and exceptionally dynamic, the REL S2 permits those with limited space or compact speakers to enjoy the benefits of Serie S performance.



£999
OR LESS

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 25 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2015. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.



www.SSAV.com



£1939
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2014
Speaker package
Best value package £1939
Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D

B&W • MT-60D • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Speaker package combining M-1 speakers with the stunning power and control of a PV1D subwoofer. Available in black or white.



£899
OR LESS

KEF • E305 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

The E Series packs uniquely advanced technologies in highly distinctive satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer.



NEW

£699
OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS • 3000 SERIES 5.1 CINEMA PACK

Perfect for every occasion, the new 3000 Series 5.1 Cinema Pack will unleash the full potential of your home cinema electronics.

Deluxe Finishes £899



£2869
OR LESS

MONITOR AUDIO • SILVER 6AV12 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Combines Silver 6 floorstanders with the acoustically matched Silver Centre and FX surrounds, all supported by the deep bass potency from the 500 watt Silver W12 subwoofer. Available in a choice of three natural wood or black oak finishes.

Black gloss (pictured) or white gloss available at extra cost.



Take hi-fi to even new heights with Bluesound's next generation. Features improved wi-fi performance, more digital and analog connectivity options and Bluetooth aptX along with support for premium music services like Tidal and Spotify. **PRICES FROM £269**



Spotify

aptX Bluetooth

5 YEAR
WARRANTY

NEW



SONOS

THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM

The Sonos Wireless Hi-Fi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with warm, full-bodied sound that's crystal clear at any volume. Sonos can fill your home with music by combining Hi-Fi sound and rock-solid wireless in a smart system that is easy to set-up, control and expand.

PRICES FROM £169

ARCAM • SOLO BAR • SOUNDBAR

Not only an ideal solution to improve on the mediocre sound quality of modern TVs, Arcam's superb engineering means it can also be used as a high quality stereo system all over the house. Optional subwoofer also available.



NEW

£799
OR LESS

aptX Bluetooth

CANTON • DM 50 • SOUNDBASE

The Canton DM 50 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 50 creates a convincing, room filling sound.



NEW

£399
OR LESS

NEW BLACK
GLASS FINISH

aptX Bluetooth

PSB • VS21 • SOUNDBASE

PSB has been creating award-winning home theatre speaker systems for decades, and the VS21 brings this extraordinary experience to the sound bar category.



aptX Bluetooth

5 YEAR
WARRANTY

NEW

£399
OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS • MEDIA 4 • SOUNDBAR

The new Q Acoustics Media 4 is a high performance Soundbar designed to deliver high fidelity reproduction of music, and high quality audio from a TV or set top box, tablets and smartphones.



WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2014
Soundbar & surround
Best value £399
Q Acoustics Media 4

aptX Bluetooth

ESSAV
.COM

DENON • HEOS HOME CINEMA • SOUNDBAR / SUB

Latest addition to Denon's HEOS range features Dolby Digital and DTS decoders, digital, USB and AUX inputs. TV sound can be distributed throughout HEOS eco system and controlled with the HEOS app or your TV's remote control.



NEW

£599
OR LESS

YAMAHA • YSP-2500 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

Reproduces overwhelmingly real presence and impact-filled bass sound. Two-unit YSP with ultra-refined design and high-grade aluminium chassis. Bluetooth® equipped, capable of wireless music play and App control.



aptX Bluetooth

ESSAV
.COM

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2014
Soundbar & surround
Best value £599
Yamaha YSP-2500

Bishop's Stortford 01279 506576
Bristol 0117 974 3727
Brighton 01273 733338
Bromley 020 8290 1988
Chalfont St Peter 0845 5046364
Cambridge 01223 304770
Chelsea 020 7352 9466
Cheltenham 01242 241171
Epsom 01372 720720
Exeter 01392 218895

Guildford 01483 536666
Holborn 020 7837 7540
Kingston 020 8547 0717
Leeds (Wetherby) 01937 586886
Loughton 020 8532 0770
Maidstone 01622 686366
Norwich 01603 767605
Oxford 01865 241773
Reading 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks 01732 459555

Sheffield 0114 255 5861
Southampton 023 8033 7770
Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
Witham (Essex) 01376 501733
Yeovil 01935 700078

CHORLEYWOOD - THIS STORE HAS RELOCATED TO
CHALFONT ST PETER
VISIT WWW.ESSAV.COM FOR ADDRESS DETAILS, OPENING
HOURS AND BRANDS STOCKED

*THESE STORES ARE FRANCHISED AND OPERATE UNDER
A LICENCE AGREEMENT TO SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION

**SEVENOAKS
SELECT**

Sign up today for our
free digital magazine
www.ssav.com/select

NEW ISSUE 1

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 23/09/2015. E&OE

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



EISA Award. The highest quality level.

EISA is the unique association of 50 special interest magazines in hi-fi, home theatre, in-car electronics, mobile electronics, photo and video, from 20 European countries.

Every year the EISA jury of experts rewards the best products in each class with an EISA Award. Where you see the EISA Award logo it's your assurance that the product is of outstanding quality.



Your assurance for quality
Tested by the Experts



www.eisa.eu

The European Imaging & Sound Association

AWARDS 2015–2016

EISA AWARDS 2015-2016

The EISA Awards celebrate the best of the best in home entertainment technology – make sure the following products are on your audition list...

The European Imaging and Sound Association (EISA) is the technology world's largest independent awards panel, incorporating nearly 50 specialist magazines from across the continent – including *HCC*. Its goal is simple: to celebrate the most desirable, highest-performing home entertainment hardware that you – the AV enthusiasts – will be spending your hard-earned pennies on.

The featured awards here cover everything from Ultra HD TVs, home theatre projectors and streaming services to Blu-ray players, speakers, soundbars, 4K camcorders and AV receivers. Chosen after a lengthy judging process throughout the Summer, during which the member magazines convene and whittle down a shortlist, these can be considered the cream of the consumer electronics crop. Read on...

**EUROPEAN HOME
THEATRE PROJECTOR
2015-2016****Epson EH-LS10000**

Epson has rewritten the projector rulebook with the EH-LS10000, combining a laser light source with 4K enhancement processing to give movie fans an experience they will love. Opting for a laser over a traditional UHP lamp brings both user benefits – the projector runs at a whisper-quiet 19dB and is rated to last up to 30,000 hours – and performance benefits. This projector mixes an exceptional black level with superb brightness, ensuring big screen images have dynamism and impact even in well-lit rooms. Full HD sources are treated to extra clarity by 4K upscaling, and the HDMI input stage will accept native UHD material up to 60Hz – perfect for Ultra HD Blu-ray. Add in its setup flexibility and curved design and the EH-LS10000 is a force to be reckoned with.



**EUROPEAN BLU-RAY
PLAYER 2015-2016****Pioneer BDP-LX88**

Blessed with gorgeous styling and a heavyweight, reassuring construction, Pioneer's BDP-LX88 looks every inch the premium disc player – and its performance and feature set only add to its appeal. A truly universal design, the BDP-LX88 can spin CD, DVD, Blu-ray, DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD and backs up this multi-functionality with hi-res audio support including FLAC, ALAC and DSD, via a network or from USB. Movie playback benefits from pristine detail delivery courtesy of Pioneer's Precise Pixel Driver processing and a wealth of powerful user adjustments. Music performance, meanwhile, is audiophile-grade, either from the player's analogue outputs (including stereo XLR) or over HDMI. Overall, this flagship spinner is a remarkable achievement fit for any home theatre.





EUROPEAN HT RECEIVER 2015-2016

Pioneer VSX-930

The Pioneer VSX-930 builds upon decades of surround sound expertise, offering precise sonics due to accurate auto-calibration through Pioneer's MCACC Pro with Full Band Phase Control, and an amazing 7.2 and Dolby Atmos experience. It also excels at streaming media, with support offered for Spotify Connect, Bluetooth and hi-res audio including DSD. The excellent iControlAV5 app allows for intuitive control, making the numerous functions of this home theatre receiver accessible to everyone. The seven-input, twin-output HDMI connectivity, meanwhile, offers HDCP 2.2 and 4K support, ideal for use with an Ultra HD display. This is a feature-packed unit at a very attractive price.

EUROPEAN HT SPEAKER SYSTEM 2015-2016

Klipsch Reference Premiere RP-280 Home Theatre System

When it comes to exciting home theatre sound, film fans strive for dynamics and thrilling surround effects – attributes offered by the Klipsch Reference Premiere system. Give this 5.1 speaker set a movie soundtrack and the eye-catching Hybrid Tractrix Horn drivers capture every detail, underpinned by punchy, well-integrated bass from the brand's rear-ported Cerametallic woofers. Cinematic immersion is granted by the use of dedicated dipole speakers for the surround channels, and the remarkable 15in woofer delivers effortless power at extremely low frequencies, as well as optional wireless hook-up. Blessed with excellent build quality and an imposing industrial design, Klipsch's flagship multichannel system makes a style statement, too.





**Best
Product**
2015-2016

HIGH END TV

Samsung UE65JS9500



EUROPEAN HIGH END TV 2015-2016

Samsung UE65JS9500

With its maximum peak luminance approaching 1,000 nits and support for HDR (High Dynamic Range) content, Samsung's 2015 flagship sets a new standard in TV technology, delivering images with revolutionary brightness. This headline feature is joined by excellent overall picture quality, scaling of any video source to its 10-bit panel's UHD resolution, and support for the latest high-end video standards including UHD video with HEVC encoding. Furthermore, the Tizen Smart TV system gives slick control over a huge choice of streaming and apps, and as a true high-end device the UE65JS9500 is equipped with twin TV tuners, a built-in camera, gesture control and Samsung's external One Connect box to future-proof against evolving technology.

EUROPEAN SMART TV 2015-2016

LG 65UF950V

Smart TV continues to evolve in the shape of the 65UF950V, an edge-lit Ultra HD TV carrying the second-generation of LG's webOS. For 2015, the usability and speed of this eye-catching, colourful interface has been improved, and with all sources (from external players to online streaming services) treated equally, finding content is easy – webOS 2.0 offers a connected TV experience that favours usability rather than complexity. The 65UF950V also showcases other talents, including wide-ranging media playback (including 4K HEVC content), mirroring of Smart devices, intuitive motion control and PVR functionality. As a Smart TV package, it's worthy of the highest praise.



**Best
Product**
2015-2016

SMART TV

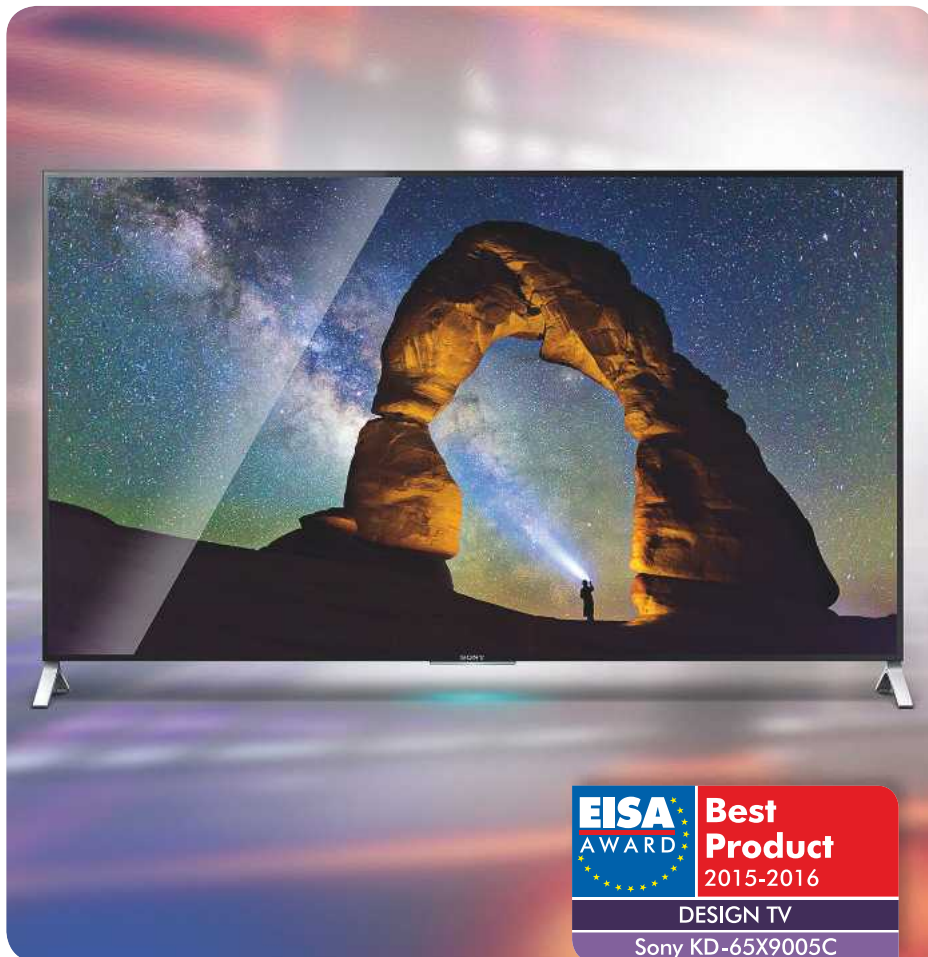
LG 65UF950V



EUROPEAN HOME THEATRE TV 2015-2016**LG 65EG960V**

Home theatre means getting the visual and emotional impact of a movie theatre in the comfort of your own home – and LG's 65EG960V OLED TV has the talents to reach this goal. Its large 65in curved screen offers an immersive visual experience, with excellent colour reproduction from wide viewing angles and low reflections when used in a bright environment. And in a darkened cinema environment the TV's WRGB OLED technology really impresses, guaranteeing premium picture quality in terms of contrast, with deep blacks alongside full bright elements. Meanwhile, the 65EG960V's UHD resolution provides excellent clarity, both with HD sources thanks to LG's upscaling technology, and when used in combination with native UHD material. Ultra-thin styling and the superb webOS 2.0 Smart TV system complete the package.





EUROPEAN DESIGN TV 2015-2016

Sony KD-65X9005C

It's not often that a TV makes you think 'Wow' before it's even switched on, but Sony's 65X9005C accomplishes this by virtue of its astonishing styling. This 65in screen brings ultra-slim appeal to your living room, being only 4.9mm at its thinnest part. It comes with an innovative mounting solution that sites the screen flush against a wall thanks to Sony's vertical airflow system, while those installing the 65X9005C on a TV stand can choose from wide or narrow positions for the sleek chrome feet. Design isn't this set's only strong point, however – the 4K Ultra HD screen together with the Sony unique Triluminos Display technology delivers colour rich, sharp images that are equally impressive, while Android TV collects all the set's features in to one sophisticated homescreen.

EUROPEAN BEST BUY TV 2015-2016

Philips 55PUS7600

Combining excellent picture quality, a pleasing sound performance and a modern Smart TV OS in an attractive package is quite a feat, especially if the price has to be right. And yet that is exactly what Philips has achieved with the 55PUS7600. This 55in television features efficient Pixel Precise UHD upscaling, excellent motion sharpness thanks to Perfect Natural Motion and HDMI 2.0 connections for your future UHD content. Three-sided Ambilight improves the viewing experience with its content-matched illumination, and Philips' Double Ring driver technology yields impressive bass performance from the screen's slender frame. Android TV, running on a Quad Core processor, opens up a world of entertainment. A well-engineered all-rounder.



**Best
Product**
2015-2016

BEST BUY TV

Philips 55PUS7600



**Best
Product**
2015-2016

BEST VALUE HT SPEAKER SYSTEM

JBL Arena Cinema 5.1



EUROPEAN BEST VALUE HT SPEAKER SYSTEM 2015-2016

JBL Arena Cinema 5.1

High-quality multichannel systems normally demand plenty of space – and serious money. Yet the JBL Arena line of affordable loudspeakers allows owners of mid-priced AV receivers to build an impressive 5.1 system within a reasonable budget. The Arena 180 floorstanding model is of a size easy to place in any room, and its well-balanced sound (delivered by waveguided tweeters and 7in mid/bass drivers) is joined by the Arena's active SUB100 subwoofer to extend low-frequency impact. A dedicated centre speaker and wall-mountable surrounds complete the series, available in white or black vinyl veneer finishes. Combined, the Arena package brings JBL's famous audio heritage to a wide audience.

EUROPEAN HT SUBWOOFER 2015-2016

ELAC SUB 2070

ELAC combines a stylish high-gloss finish, robust construction and state-of-the-art technology within its SUB 2070. Using back-to-back 10in drivers arranged in a push/push configuration to remove unwanted resonances, plus a 600W amplifier, the SUB 2070 is able to power large rooms with effortless dynamics and precision, hitting frequencies down to 20Hz. To help get the best performance possible in your theatre, the subwoofer is fully adjustable via a free app, which includes parametric EQ and automatic acoustic calibration. Hit the Auto EQ button and, by placing your smartphone or tablet close to the woofer and again at your listening position, the SUB 2070 fine-tunes its performance for your environment. Genius!



**Best
Product**
2015-2016

HT SUBWOOFER

ELAC SUB 2070



EUROPEAN PHOTO & VIDEO CAMERA**Panasonic Lumix DMC-G7**

The G7 is a true video + stills hybrid camera that brings internal 4K video recording at a very affordable price. This is backed up by a full range of video features including microphone input and a focus peaking display. Stills photographers are not neglected, with a 16-million-pixel Four Thirds sensor, 2.36-million-dot electronic viewfinder, ISO 100-25600, continuous shooting at 8 fps, and a silent electronic shutter with speeds up to 1/16000 sec. The large grip, twin control dials and fully articulated touchscreen give excellent handling. For amateur filmmakers in particular, the G7 is a game-changer.

**CAMCORDER****Panasonic HC-WX970****EUROPEAN CAMCORDER 2015-2016****Panasonic HC-WX970**

Movie-makers looking for a 4K camcorder are rewarded by Panasonic's HC-WX970 – an affordable model that packs welcome features into its compact body, including an innovative twin recording function. In addition to its main Leica Dicomar lens (married to an 18.91MP sensor), the camera provides a secondary swivel lens next to the tilting 3in touch display. This allows simultaneous capture of two different scenes – with one placed in the corner of the main shoot, selfie-style. Achieving high-quality, smooth footage is made easy by the camera's efficient image stabilisation circuit and Level Shot function that automatically counters tilt, and varied recording modes include HDR (High Dynamic Range) for brilliant, impactful pictures.

EUROPEAN HT STREAMING SOLUTION 2015-2016**Netflix**

Home theatre used to be only about physical media, but internet streaming giant Netflix now provides an excellent alternative to Blu-ray. Offering a wide range of Hollywood movies and an expanding library of popular TV shows, being a Netflix subscriber (on a flat monthly fee) means you are never short of something to watch, and finding your favourites is helped by well-structured menus and personalized recommendations. Its appeal is not only quantity, though – support for 4K and upcoming HDR content makes Netflix a perfect partner for the latest generation of Ultra HD TVs, with 5.1 audio frequently provided for your speaker system too. And, of course, Netflix will stream to your laptop, smartphone or tablet, delivering movies-on-demand wherever you want.



**EUROPEAN HT SOLUTION
2015-2016****Philips Fidelio B5**

Philips' Fidelio B5 wireless surround sound system is a nifty update of its HTL9100 predecessor, with detachable, self-powered side speakers that can easily switch the sound experience from stereo to multichannel when desired. Now revamped to work as portable Bluetooth models for music streaming flexibility, each side speaker has an internal battery lasting up to 10 hours, charged when connected to the main unit. The Fidelio B5 performs admirably in all modes, with the driver array and wireless subwoofer adding depth and clarity to music, TV and movie mixes. And the curved, 'airfoil' design and wide range of connections make it easy to integrate Philips' innovative speaker system into any living room setup.


**Best
Product**
2015-2016

HT SOLUTION

Philips Fidelio B5

**EUROPEAN SOUNDBASE
2015-2016****Sony HT-XT3**

Sony's HT-XT3 soundbase offers stunning audio quality, extensive network features and a slim, stylish cabinet that can accommodate screens up to 65in and 50kg. High-quality performance is provided by coaxial speakers that incorporate fibreglass reinforced cones and a centred dome tweeter, while powerful bass is delivered by two down-firing woofers. Connectivity is superb, including HDMI, Ethernet, Wi-Fi, USB, Bluetooth, NFC and compatibility with Google Cast. Hi-Res audio formats, such as Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio, FLAC, WAV and DSD are supported, and thanks to its networking talents the HT-XT3 can be part of a wider multiroom audio system, controlled by Sony's SongPal app. This is a great-sounding, well-equipped soundbase speaker at an enticing price.


**Best
Product**
2015-2016

SOUNDBASE

Sony HT-XT3

**EUROPEAN SOUNDBAR
2015-2016****Canton DM 90.3**

In the increasingly diverse soundbar market, Canton's DM 90.3 stands out due to its premium 2.1-channel performance – this is a benchmark product in its class. A pair of 110mm coaxial drivers offer a smooth midrange and detailed high-frequency delivery, while four 110mm woofers enable a powerful, precise and dynamic low-end, with 300W total power. The well-made, rigid enclosure sports an uncluttered design and will provide a suitable match to largescreen TVs. Furthermore, the DM 90.3 has all the features to act as a home entertainment hub. Its trio of HDMI inputs can handle 3D and 4K video sources, while other analogue and digital connections, plus aptX Bluetooth provide additional flexibility.


**Best
Product**
2015-2016

SOUNDBAR

Canton DM 90.3

And the rest of the EISA Awards from Hi-Fi, Photo, Mobile Devices and In-Car Electronics

Hi-Fi

EUROPEAN LOUDSPEAKER 2015-2016
Bowers & Wilkins CM6 S2

EUROPEAN HIGH-END AMPLIFIER
2015-2016
Mark Levinson No585

EUROPEAN USB DAC/HEADPHONE
AMPLIFIER 2015-2016
OPPO HA-2

EUROPEAN HIGH-END LOUDSPEAKER
2015-2016
Focal Sopra No2

EUROPEAN AMPLIFIER 2015-2016
Hegel H160

EUROPEAN COMPACT HI-FI SYSTEM
2015-2016
Naim Mu-so

EUROPEAN HEADPHONES 2015-2016
Sennheiser MOMENTUM 2

EUROPEAN TURNTABLE 2015-2016
Pro-Ject RPM3 Carbon

EUROPEAN NETWORK MEDIA PLAYER
2015-2016
Marantz NA8005

EUROPEAN MULTIROOM SYSTEM
2015-2016
Denon HEOS

Photography

EUROPEAN CONSUMER COMPACT
SYSTEM CAMERA 2015-2016
Fujifilm X-T10

EUROPEAN PROSUMER COMPACT
SYSTEM CAMERA 2015-2016
Olympus OM-D E-M5 II

EUROPEAN CONSUMER DSLR CAMERA
2015-2016
Nikon D5500

EUROPEAN PROSUMER DSLR CAMERA
2015-2016
Canon EOS 7D Mark II

EUROPEAN DSLR LENS 2015-2016
SIGMA 24mm F1.4 DG HSM | Art

EUROPEAN DSLR ZOOM LENS 2015-2016
Tamron SP 15-30mm F2.8 Di VC USD

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL DSLR
CAMERA 2015-2016
Canon EOS 5DS/5DS R

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL COMPACT
SYSTEM CAMERA 2015-2016
Sony α7 II

EUROPEAN PREMIUM COMPACT
CAMERA 2015-2016
Leica Q

EUROPEAN TRAVEL COMPACT CAMERA
2015-2016
Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX90/V

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL DSLR LENS
2015-2016
Canon EF 11-24mm f/4L USM

EUROPEAN DSLR TELEPHOTO ZOOM
LENS 2015-2016
SIGMA 150-600mm F5-6.3 DG OS HSM | Sports

EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM LENS
2015-2016
Sony FE 90mm F2.8 Macro G OSS

EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM ZOOM
LENS 2015-2016
Fujifilm Fujinon XF 16-55mm F2.8 R LM WR

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL COMPACT
SYSTEM LENS 2015-2016
Olympus M.Zuiko Digital ED 40-150mm F2.8 PRO

EUROPEAN PHOTO INNOVATION
2015-2016
Dxo ONE

EUROPEAN SMARTPHONE CAMERA
2015-2016 (Combined award with Mobile
Devices Expert Group)
LG G4

Mobile Devices

EUROPEAN ADVANCED SMARTPHONE
2015-2016
Samsung Galaxy S6 edge

EUROPEAN CONSUMER SMARTPHONE
2015-2016
Huawei P8

EUROPEAN TABLET 2015-2016
Lenovo YOGA Tablet 2 Pro

EUROPEAN MULTIMEDIA SMARTPHONE
2015-2016
Sony Xperia Z3+

EUROPEAN MOBILE HEADPHONES
2015-2016
AKG N60NC

EUROPEAN MOBILE SPEAKER 2015-2016
JBL Xtreme

EUROPEAN WEARABLE DEVICE
2015-2016
LG Watch Urbane

In-Car Electronics

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HEAD UNIT
2015-2016
Kenwood DNX7150DAB

EUROPEAN IN-CAR AMPLIFIER 2015-2016
HELIX P SIX DSP

EUROPEAN IN-CAR SPEAKER SYSTEM
2015-2016
Hertz MLK 1650.3

EUROPEAN IN-CAR SUBWOOFER
2015-2016
Focal Performance Expert P 25 F

EUROPEAN IN-CAR PROCESSOR
2015-2016
HELIX DSP PRO

EUROPEAN IN-CAR PREMIUM UPGRADE
2015-2016
Alpine X701D-A

EUROPEAN IN-CAR SMART UPGRADE
2015-2016
MOSCONI GLADEN PICO 2

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HIGH-END
COMPONENT 2015-2016
Ground Zero GZPW Reference 250



For further information about
EISA visit: www.eisa.eu



AV AVENGER

A few years ago **Steve May** spent most of his spare time relaxing and watching a movie or two. Now he works 24/7 to get through a never-ending diet of televisual delights

I NEED TO keep this brief, I'm afraid. Dreadfully busy. I've got an appointment in *Wayward Pines*, followed by a catch-up with *Penny Dreadful* and *Falling Skies*. And somewhere in between I need to scoff some #GBBO. Things in the May household are positively frantic.

Truth is, I'm drowning in television. What was once a comfortable indulgence has become a hard-nosed war of attrition. As fast as I can play through stuff, more of it arrives. Watching telly is now a full-time occupation.

Netflix and Amazon are largely to blame. No longer content to simply regurgitate old shows, they're now commissioning new stuff – and it's mostly too damn good to ignore. Brutal crime drama *Narcos*? Yep, I like the look of that. But should I watch it before or after *Marco Polo*? *Bosch*? Oh I need to see that. Just have to wrap up *Outlander* first.

It's getting ridiculous.

Sshh! Less of the spoilers, please

Water cooler TV chat is no longer about plot twists or classic episodes, it's the place for progress reports. A universal fear of spoilers means we no longer talk to each other about telly shows, we just tick them off. Is *Better Call Saul* a fitting prequel to *Breaking Bad*? Don't ask me, I've only just started *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and there's ten seasons of that to get through.

Back in the day when *The Matrix* was fresh in the memory and full-length black coats were all the rage, I would have bitten your arm off (*Walking Dead*, Season 6, must set up my series link) to watch a sci-fi TV show by the Wachowskis. But now *Sense8*, produced by the duo and available on Netflix, is relegated to

the long list, alongside the likes of *Orange is the New Black* and *Transparent*.

And it's not like I'm just trying to keep up with the over-the-'net crew. Linear TV is killing me, too. My now elderly VirginMedia TiVo box is staggering under the weight of TV shows that are still waiting to be viewed after more than a year in storage (actually longer, but that's too embarrassing to admit). My Sky+HD box (yes, I'm an equal opportunities hoarder) would have been even worse, had it not died on me and taken all my timeshifted treasures with it. Luckily, almost everything I lost is now available from Sky's burgeoning box set archive (ooh, J.J. Abrams' *Alias* in hi-def, never did get around to finishing that...) so I'm probably not going to miss out. Mind you, I still have unwatched DVDs wrapped in cellophane on my shelves, so I'm nothing if not consistent.

And all this is without the peril of the accidental hook. **I had no intention of following BBC2's conspiracy thriller *Odyssey*, my eyes just alighted on it during a moment of weakness. Next thing I knew it was on hard rotation from iPlayer.** At least if I miss anything good on ITV or Channel 5 I know I won't be compelled to catch up, because the on-demand platforms of those two broadcast bigwigs are such dross. Some relief there.

Not that I'm actually looking for respite. I'm addicted to this ceaseless episodic feast, and my appetite is far from sated. Damn, DC's *Legends of Tomorrow* looks good! And *Heroes Reborn*? Sign me up.

So, note to Ed: next month's column might be a bit late... ■

Want to recommend another TV series for Steve to watch? Send us an email via letters@homecinemachoice.com

Steve May is now off to work on his *Great British Bake-Off* inspired 'showstopper' – a walnut and coffee sponge cake in the shape of a Sky+HD box



LG PRIME UHD TV

Merging ColourPrime technology, ULTRA Luminance and an IPS 4K panel LG PRIME UHD TV – powered by the Prime Mastering Engine – delivers a new standard of definition. The fusion of these technologies means you will experience eye-popping colours, deep contrast and perfect clarity from all angles, as you see every detail come alive – all in 4K resolution.

Innovation for a better life

**EVERY COLOUR
COMES ALIVE**



lg.com/uk/discoverprime



2015_H1_LEC_C

oppo

3 EISA WINS IN A ROW!

2013-2014

EUROPEAN HI-FI

HOME THEATRE UNIVERSAL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

BDP-103EU

2014-2015

EUROPEAN HI-FI

HEADPHONE OF THE YEAR

PM-1



“heavyweight build quality”

“astonishing range of features”

“the smart choice”



“the most exciting new headphones to have been released this year”

“a remarkable debut”

“Painstakingly engineered”

“sublime”



“keenly priced”

“aimed at the style conscious”

oppodigital.co.uk